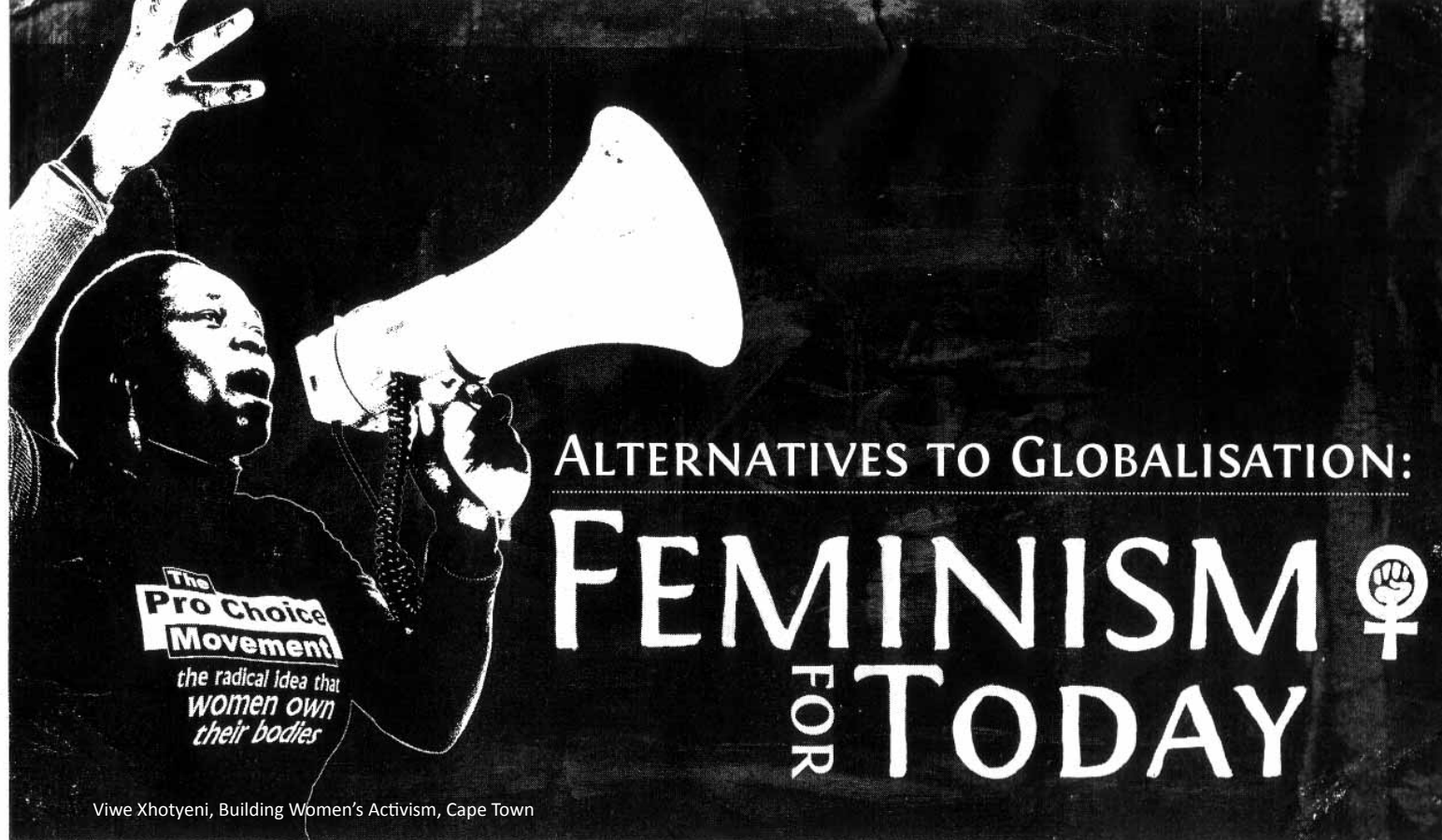




Volume 1

FEMINISM for TODAY



ALTERNATIVES TO GLOBALISATION:

FEMINISM FOR TODAY

Viwe Xhotyeni, Building Women's Activism, Cape Town

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This booklet comes out of ILRIG's ongoing research and education work with trade unions and social movements in South Africa, and from a number of books and articles on feminism, gender, power, and women's movements.

We would like to thank the following activists

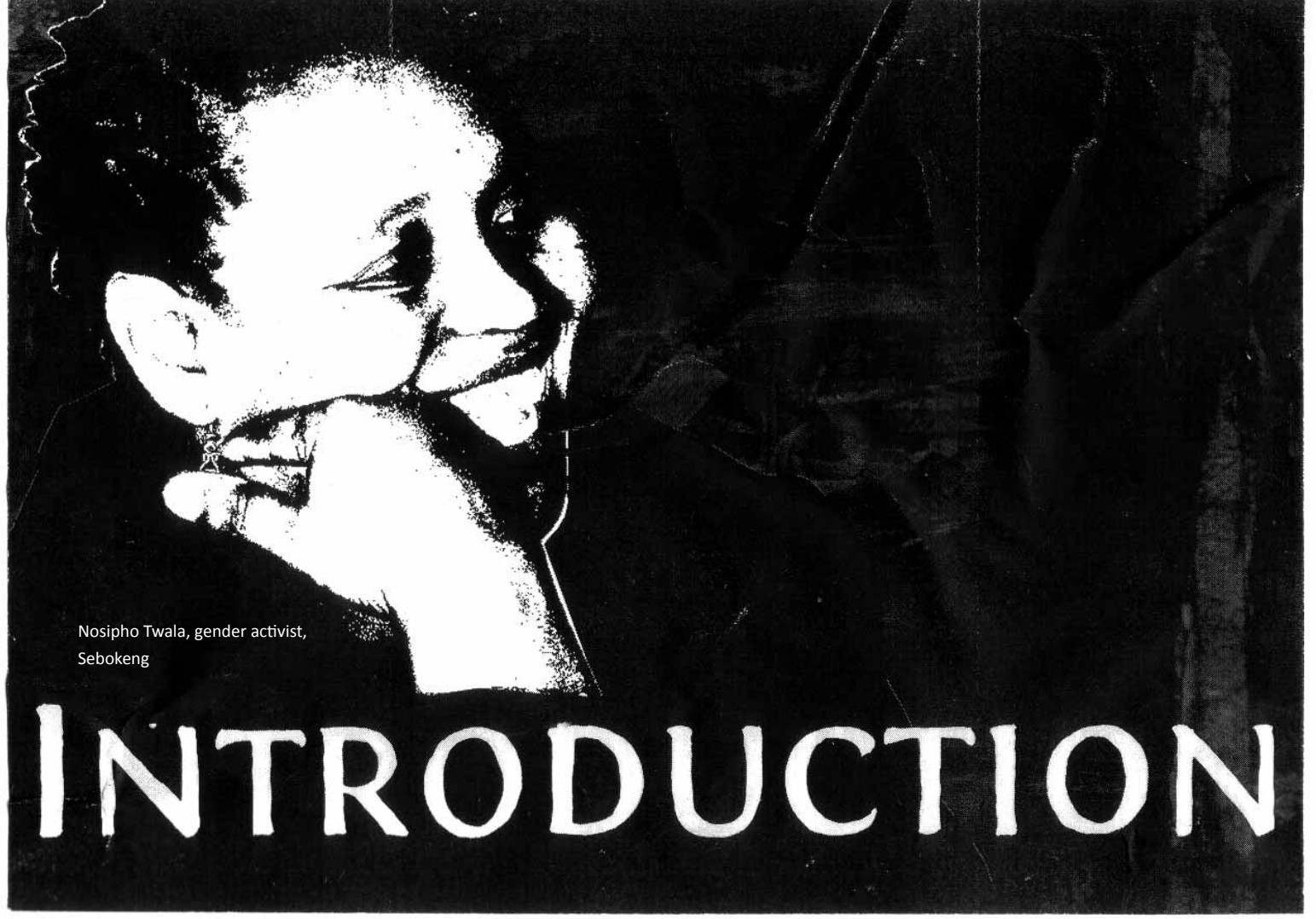
- a. The members of the Treatment Action Campaign and the Anti-Eviction Campaign in Cape Town, whom ILRIG interviewed in 2005 about women's participation and women's leadership in new social movements.
- b. The participants in the Building Women's Activism Public Forums: since October 2005 we have been hosting a public women-only space in which women from over 20 organisations across Cape Town come to support, learn, network, and act. BWA was created by feminist activists after women were shut up in a public forum intended to discuss 'Gender Activism: Women in Unions and Social Movements'. During the discussion session a number of men made openly sexist comments. These were challenged by some of the

women present. The men responded in such an aggressive and abusive manner that the women nearly walked out.

Afterwards we convened a women-only workshop to discuss anti-sexist strategies since this discussion was derailed at the public forum. The space continues to draw anywhere between 10 and 50 women and has been used for sessions on capitalism and patriarchy, reproductive health, sharing our struggles, and orchestrating international solidarity with women in Zimbabwe, Palestine, and Nigeria.

- c. The participants in the Building Women's Leadership Seminar held in May 2007. This seminar brought together feminist activists from social movements, unions, and progressive NGOs attempting women-only feminist popular political education as a way of confronting sexism within our movements.

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Nosipho Twala, gender activist,
Sebokeng

INTRODUCTION

“Women do the hard work, they are involved on the ground but men make the important decisions and seize leadership.”

(Building Women’s Activism participant, 2006)

“Like the 1987 strike campaign for parental rights, this fight against sexism will be a painful struggle in the movements!”

(SACCAWU shop steward, 2007)

WHY THIS BOOKLET?

This booklet is directed at women and men involved in struggles for democratic rights, against evictions, and water cut-offs, for treatment for HIV/AIDS, for job security and a living wage, and for access to land and livelihoods. It tells us that we can’t win any of our struggles if women and men do not stand side by side as equals. That we undermine our struggles for a better life and for real democracy if we continue to place obstacles

in the way of the full freedom for women in all decision-making – in political life, in the workplace and in the home. We call the booklet ‘Feminism for Today’, mindful of the fact that many people are scared of the word, are scared of being called a “feminist”. That many activists would prefer to speak about “gender” or “women”, as something more neutral and less divisive, or about the “women’s movement” as something that we all can support – as long as it doesn’t really challenge our existing structures.

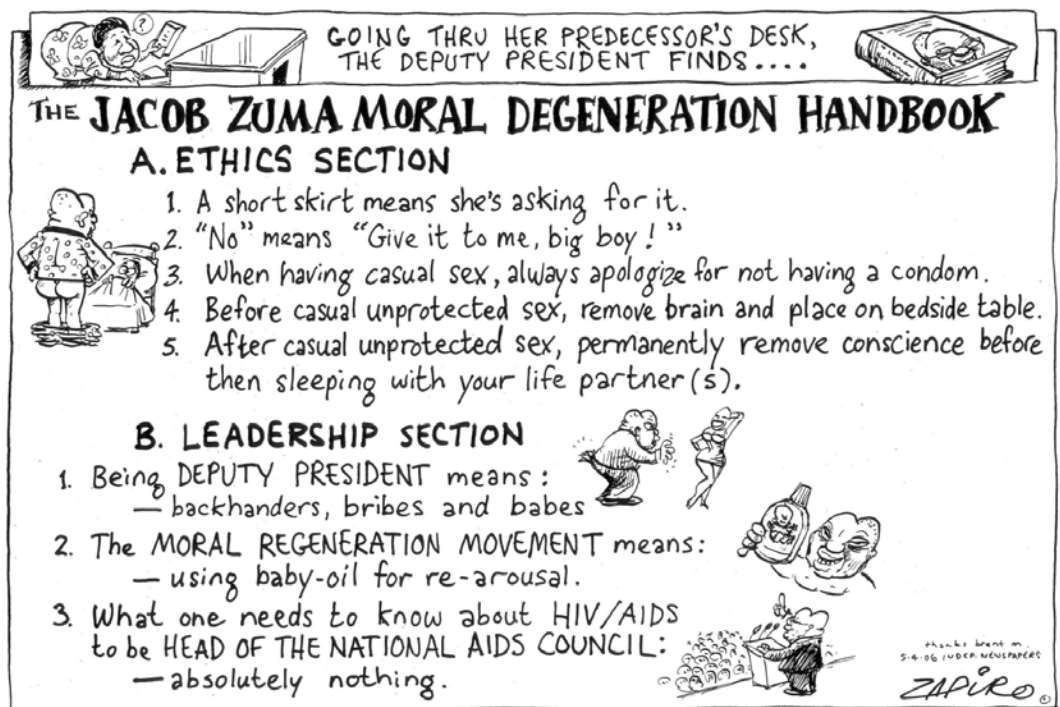
THIS BOOKLET IS AIMED AT PEOPLE:

- Who are involved in a social movement or a trade union
- Who are in a campaign or a women's organisation
- Who are in a project trying to help women or an NGO lobbying for women's rights

It is time that activists understand the challenge of feminism in its own words. In the same way that we haven't been shy to say that it is our right to have democracy, free water and electricity and a living wage, so it should be our right to challenge male domination. So we are calling a spade a spade, and naming our alternative what it is – feminism.

Many female and male activists are currently struggling in trade unions and social movements to build a better life for everyone. This booklet will focus on the experiences of social movement and trade union activists and suggest that feminism should be a guiding principle of all our struggles. We also draw on feminist writers from past struggles and those who were involved in struggles in other countries, to understand some debates within the feminist movement today.

Many people may say that in the new South Africa everyone is equal and women's rights are protected in the Constitution. So why should we still be struggling for women's liberation? It is true that women have made some advances in law and in our Constitution, but for millions of working-class women sexist oppression, seen most clearly in the statistics of sexual violence, continues on a daily basis. There is a gap between the talk of equality and the reality. And this gap has been made worse as the quality of life of all working-class people is attacked by cuts in public services, privatisation and unemployment – and women bear the worst effects of these attacks.





Public service strike 2007

Today, after many years of declining militancy, we are beginning to see new struggles all over South Africa. Women are the majority of the members in these new struggles – in what many call new social movements. They are the most active participants in organised resistance, in meetings, in marches, demonstrations and strikes.

Women in the movements today are expressing similar sentiments to what we heard during the peak of the anti-apartheid struggle. When asked why women make up the majority of people mobilising and protesting today an activist said:

“Women are vocal because they are the people who feel the pain. In the meeting we try to be equal, because we are sharing the problems like the problem of housing.”

Activists have described how women are more affected by water cut-offs and lack of housing:

“It is mainly women that use water and electricity for cooking and caring for our families. When water and electricity supplies are cut off it is women who take on the burden of looking for alternative sources since women in most of our families are expected to take care of their families.”

(TAC member, Mitchell’s Plain, 2004)

Yet there is often a denial that sexism is really so rampant:

“Some [men] do not care because issues that relate to water are viewed as women’s responsibility in most of the homes. Women are expected to look after the home and men see themselves as responsible for working.”

(AEC Activist, Mandela Park, 2004)

Women activists throughout history have therefore argued for a feminist movement:

“Our politics initially sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else’s but because of our needs as human persons ... this may seem so obvious and sound simplistic, but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression as a priority or worked seriously for ending that oppression ... We reject pedestals, queenhood, and walking ten paces behind.”

(The Combahee River Collective, 1974)

Women’s leadership is needed today in the fight against neoliberal globalisation because globalisation pushes many of the responsibilities of the state onto women and young girls. If a toddler cannot go to crèche, most likely a woman or young girl will have the

task of childcare. If there are no health care facilities, most likely a woman will have to look after the sick family members at home.

By placing this extra load on women, globalisation makes it harder for us to carry out our gender roles – and even harder for us to challenge the assumption that these responsibilities should be carried out by women alone.

When we look at the service delivery protests in South Africa today we therefore find mostly women involved. And yet, in most cases, when we look to the leadership of the organisations in the communities, men are in the majority. Similar sexist dynamics exist in the trade union movement. Even unions that have a majority of women members typically have

a predominantly male leadership. Without a feminist analysis it is easy for activists to uphold patriarchy and recreate sexist oppression while claiming to be fighting capitalist oppression. Feminism attempts to address sexism everywhere it rears its ugly head and until women's leading role in struggles and our special skills and experiences are recognised, a political force capable of smashing the neo-liberal agenda and implimenting human liberation is unlikely to emerge.

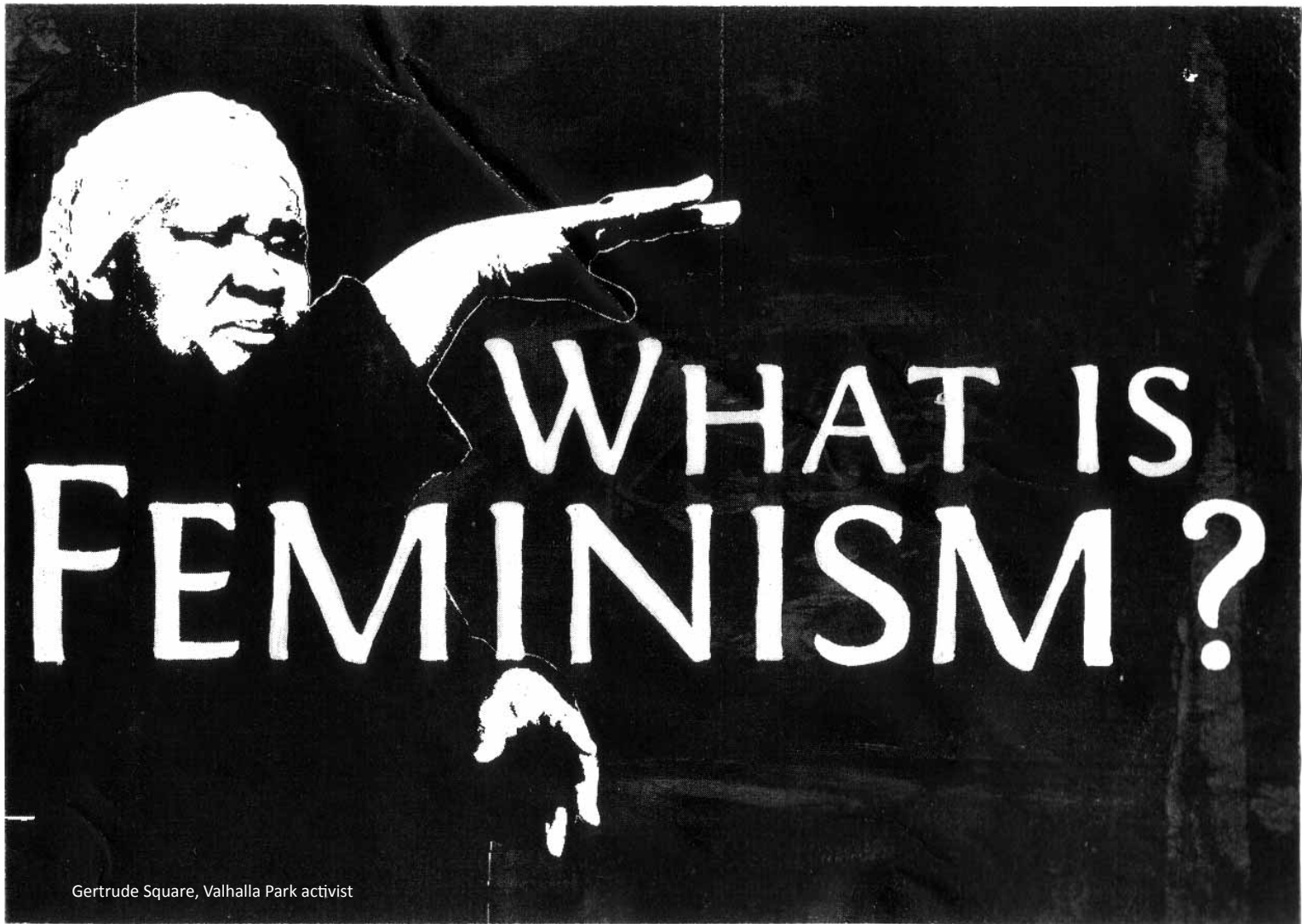
Women activists are themselves determined to organise to fight patriarchy:

"In order to solve things we have to start where we are, liberate ourselves to liberate one another."

(Building Women's Activism Participant, 2007)

Aunty Gerty Square, Valhalla Park housing activist, teaching informal settlements to legally defend their right to land re-occupation.





Gertrude Square, Valhalla Park activist

CHAPTER 1

"I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute [sic.]"

(Rebecca West, Suffragist, 1913)

When you hear the word "feminism," what comes to mind?

There are many views about what the term feminism means and what its aims in struggle are. **Here we use the definition that feminism is the fight against sexism.**

For us, it is about opposing patriarchy or male domination. It is not about uplifting women to become men or to have the power men have currently. Feminism seeks to develop an alternative for everyone interested in ending all forms of oppression.

MEANINGS OF TERMS

Sexism is the practice of discriminating against women on the basis of their physical sex – female. Related to sexism is **homophobia** – discriminating against people because of their sexual orientation.

Gender is about the way our form of society imposes roles on women and men as feminine and masculine as if this were natural or eternal. Those in power, the owners of wealth, made up rules to govern the way women and men are supposed to behave in a given situation. These rules have changed in different times and places throughout history. For example, pink used to be for boys – as a colour closer to blood and fire – and light blue for baby girls, to symbolise softness like the sky. Now these colours are reversed and filled with another meaning: pink for feminine, and blue for masculine. Such invented roles continue for the rest of our lives.

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”

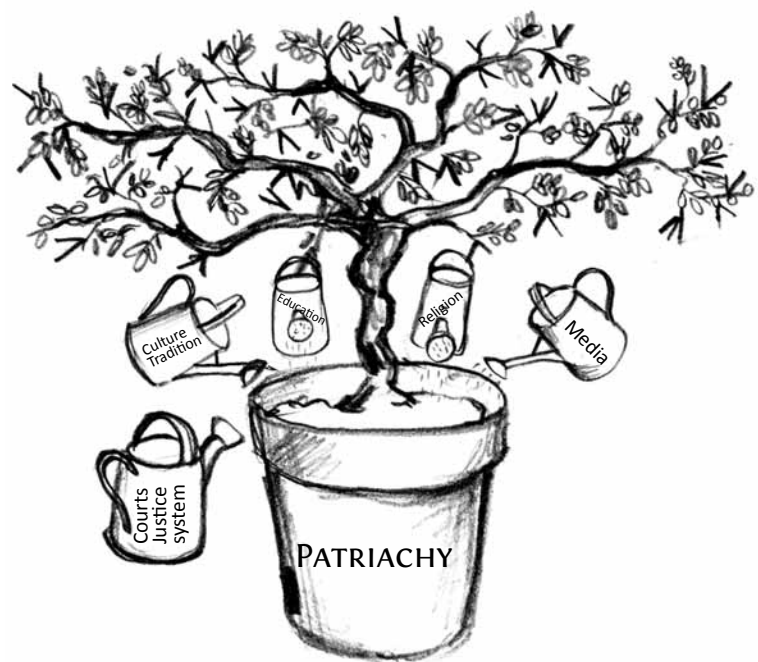
(Simone de Beauvoir, French feminist, 1949)

Male domination means that men have power and authority in all the institutions of our lives – the state, the church, the family etc. The few women who achieve positions of authority find obstacles put in their way to prevent them from challenging male power. Male domination is based on the idea that men are superior to women. In its most extreme form is **misogyny** or the hatred of women, which leads to violence against women.

Because there are more men in power they can shape culture in a way that reflects and serves male collective interests. For example, handling rape, and sexual harassment cases in a way that puts the victim, not the accused, on trial. Or prosecuting sex workers and not their clients. A male-dominated society does not mean that all men are powerful and all women are powerless – but it does mean that power is concentrated in male hands.

Patriarchy is the system of male authority, which makes the oppression of women seem natural and eternal. Because this system appears so natural, it is almost invisible but patriarchy functions through political, economic, legal, cultural and religious institutions – and, if it is challenged – through **violence**. Patriarchy has changed over time, and has served ruling class interests under slavery, feudalism and capitalism. Thus to challenge patriarchy effectively also means challenging other systems of oppression and exploitation – like class oppression and racism – which frequently support each other.

HOW PATRIARCHY SURVIVES



WHAT ABOUT CULTURE?

Often when we struggle for our full humanity we come head to head with the argument that this or that sexist practice is “our culture”. Males should dominate because it is “our culture”. But this fails to recognise the dynamic nature of cultures – they change as circumstances change. And because men are in power they can shape culture in a way that reflects and serves male collective interests. This has been the case with all cultures – Western, Eastern and African.

Many religions, for example, say that women came after men, to accompany men, and deny women control over their own bodies by forbidding contraception and abortion and by teaching women that they are subordinate in marriage. A subordinate woman does not have the right to refuse sex.

We have seen the ways that the apartheid state tried to use cultural differences to justify racial oppression. How that state also tried to divide the oppressed along tribal lines, making up all sorts of lies about culture to put people into Bantustans. In South Africa today many men try to attack struggles against patriarchy by saying that feminism is foreign and against “our culture”. And many women participate in cultural practices that keep women subordinate to men. In Swaziland this argument has been used to keep the monarchy in power, to suppress democratic rights, to force young girls to be added to the King’s wives and to undergo virginity testing. Apartheid and colonialism have deliberately invented and re-invented culture just as the people have themselves challenged those inventions.

As activists within movements we need to challenge the power relations invested in seeing culture as static or always in our best interest. Otherwise we can see the outcome when some people targeted coalitions like the “1 in 9” (number of reported rapes) campaign because they campaigned against Jacob Zuma’s claim that he went ahead with condom-less sex because it was against Zulu “culture” to leave a woman, supposedly, in a state of arousal.

In many parts of Africa there are traditions of land ownership and wife inheritance that favour men. Women cannot inherit land and often become the wives of their deceased husband’s brothers. In other words, when a man dies of AIDS-related illnesses, his widow is likely to infect his brother and through him any other wives. In Kenya, where infection rates of HIV are high, this has resulted in the increased spread of infections. Because women cannot inherit land they have been forced into accepting this culture of wife inheritance. But now they are challenging these traditions and putting women and land ownership at the centre of the fight against AIDS.

WOMEN’S MOVEMENTS AND FEMINISM

“If we are not the owners of our own bodies we are worth nothing. Health, sexuality, everything around my body, if my body belongs to me, then I have power to do whatever.”

(Activist from Sebokeng, 2007)

There are today, as there have been over hundreds of years, many organisations

of women – women’s circles in churches, housewives’ leagues, women’s sections of political parties and women’s sections of the labour movement. All of them are, in some sense, as instances of women acting collectively, challenges to male domination. All of them are potentially part of a broad women’s movement.

Feminism is also part of such a broad movement. But feminism is a specific, current within the movement. Feminism salutes the

way that women can struggle to survive and make changes but also criticises the way that many of us can at the same time uphold the system that oppresses us. Feminists not only argue that women are full and equal human beings but also seek to challenge the structures that marginalise us and even the aspects of our lives that others tell us are “personal” or

private. We do not regard wife battery, the way a woman gets seen as an object, or sexual harassment, as individual problems but as social issues, which need to be challenged collectively. Feminist activists seek to challenge all limitations on realising the full human potential of women, through campaigns of activism.

KINDS OF FEMINISM: LIBERAL AND RADICAL

Over many years there have been many feminists and feminist movements – with different ideas and methods of struggle. We can however broadly group these into two general trends – **liberal feminism** and **radical feminism**. Liberal and radical feminists differ in their analyses of the causes of sexism and patriarchy and therefore have different solutions to women’s oppression and different methods of struggle.

Liberal feminists generally suggest that women need to be taken up into the leadership of powerful institutions like business corporations, the church, education and governments and added to the mix to be equal to men. They focus on strong women who have succeeded in the current system and campaign for strengthening or amending existing laws or educating women to uplift them and help them to succeed.

Radical feminists, on the other hand, argue that the structures and institutions of our society are patriarchal and as such the whole system needs to change. They argue that changing the system means women and men need to challenge male power in the state, in public and private life and that new ways of real equality need to be found. They believe that all aspects of women’s potential need to be unchained – the intellectual, the emotional and the sexual.

AN EXAMPLE OF RADICAL FEMINIST ORGANISING IN BOLIVIA: MUJERES CREANDO

Mujeres Creando means Women Creating and is a Bolivian anarchist feminist collective that participates in a range of social movements and has programmes of street theatre and direct action. The group publishes *Mujer Publica* (Public Woman), produces a weekly radio show, and maintains a cultural café named *Carcajada* (Laughter).

Mujeres Creando gained international attention due to their involvement in the 2001 occupation of the Bolivian Banking Supervisory Agency on behalf of people indebted to micro-credit institutions. The occupants, armed with dynamite and molotov cocktails, demanded total debt forgiveness and achieved some limited success. Julieta Ojeda, a member of Mujeres Creando, explains that “in reality the financial institutions were cheating people and exploiting their ignorance, making them sign contracts that they didn’t understand”. Mujeres Creando has denied that members directly participated in the occupation.

On August 15, 2002 members of Mujeres Creando and supporters involved in the production of an educational film dealing with violence in relation to women’s human rights were beaten by La Paz police, which was condemned by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission.

WHY ARE WOMEN OPPRESSED?

There are different views as to why society is male-dominated. Some of these views try to preserve the current situation of male domination and some try to change it.

CONSERVATIVE VIEWS

These people argue that men are natural leaders and that this is so, they say, because men have always been leaders of the family, the heads of households, the breadwinners, the political leaders and the bosses of kingdoms and companies. They tend to justify this view by pointing to biological differences between men and women and then read into these differences things that make men “natural leaders” – like physical strength and speed – and things that make women “natural care-givers” – like having babies and breastfeeding.

Their views are then supported by interpretations of religious teachings, by practices that have occurred for so long that people call them “our culture”.

But on top of these justifications there is a long history of university professors, scientists and “experts” who have apparently “proven” the natural and eternal domination of men in societies by studying the behaviour of animals, human biology and even theories of genetics.

LIBERAL FEMINISM

Liberal feminists tend to argue that the source of women’s oppression lies in prejudice, in people’s mistaken ideas. Men occupy the dominant roles in society because women have mistakenly allowed this to happen. Patriarchy is thus something that arises because of ideologies of male supremacy. Liberal feminists place more emphasis on **correcting male bias** in current structures and systems but not necessarily struggling to overturn these structures themselves.

Liberal feminism sees the goal of women’s struggles as **formal equality** between women

and men, not necessarily to end patriarchy as a system. Some can be courageous and bold while others tend to seek solutions in the form of good female role-models, to give girls confidence. Others lobby governments for pro-women reforms as well as try to influence corporations and other decision-makers. Often they do not connect sexism as a system of oppression with other oppressive systems like capitalism, racism and xenophobia.

RADICAL FEMINISM

Radical feminists say that patriarchy reinforces male domination over women in all institutions and spheres of life and is the **oldest form of oppression**. Radical feminists have explored the links between systems of exploitation – from slavery to feudalism to capitalism – and patriarchy.

Some radical feminists understand women’s oppression to be rooted in sexual relations reproduced between men and women, within in the **family**, and in all institutions. The system of patriarchy has evolved over the last 1500 years to control **women’s bodies** and sexuality, from the physical, to the religious. The very formation of the state was done in such a way as to strengthen patriarchy, but today it is taken as age-old and given. Patriarchy has changed over time, and slavery, feudalism and capitalism are just a few historical manifestations of patriarchy.

Race, class, gender:
Shifting childcare work
from one woman to
another.





Other radical feminists understand women's oppression to be rooted in the contest over **ownership** and **control** of the social **surplus** produced by people over many hundreds of years. They say that patriarchy serves capitalism as it had done for slavery and feudalism before.

In South Africa black women's domestic labour, as unpaid labour, including the maintenance of a rural subsistence economy, was used to ensure the availability and cheapness of black male workers in the cities, mines and farms of apartheid capitalism.

CAPITALISM AND PATRIARCHY

Under capitalism, those who own the wealth – the capitalists – achieve this by making profits from the goods created by workers. They pay workers wages to cover the cost of their livelihood whilst making workers work for longer, to produce more than that required to cover for their own needs. The longer workers work extra in this way the more profit for the capitalists; or, the less workers get for their own survival the more the profit.

When women became employed in increasing numbers they were hired in forms of work regarded as extensions of what they did at home – the caring industries of nursing and teaching, secretarial and administrative duties and those industries which drew on women's household skills of sewing and knitting – the clothing and textile industries.

In the Bantustans women's labour in African kinships systems "freed" male migrants from the rural areas. These men could then serve the growing mining industry at labour costs that were cheap. The mining bosses could presume that the low wages of the men were compensated by the means of subsistence generated by female-run households in the reserves. This system began to break down in the mid-twentieth century but it has remained a defining feature of the South African labour market.

African women flocked to the cities in the 1940s and 1950s as apartheid pass laws were either relaxed by the state or defied by black women themselves.

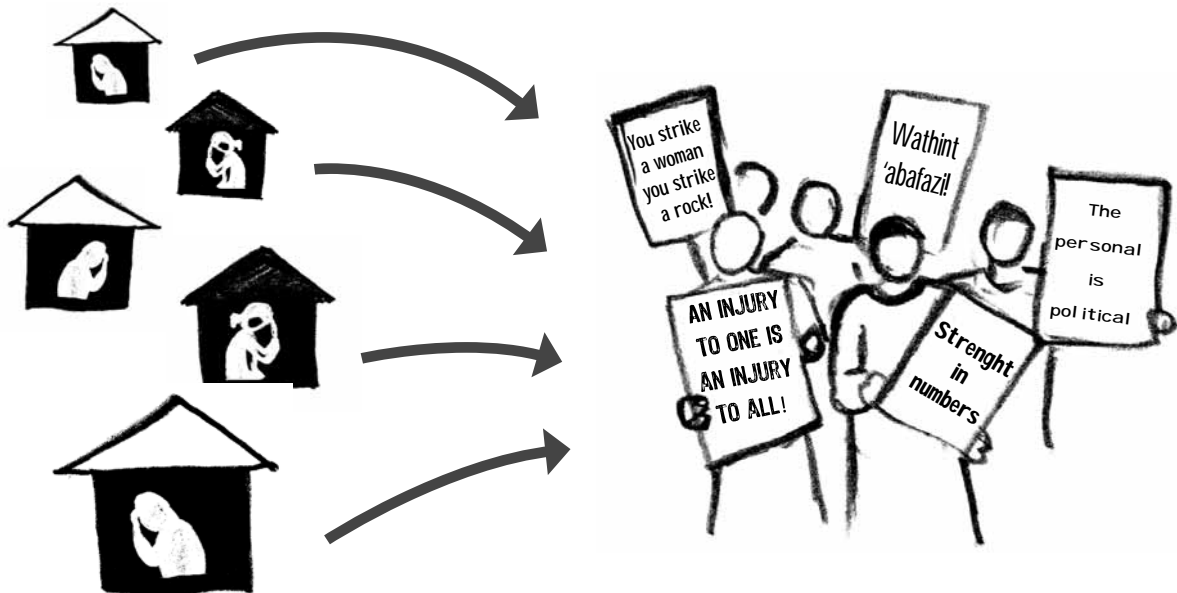
The result is that the sexual division of labour took the extreme form amongst South Africa's black workers – of female-headed households in the rural areas (with largely absent male workers located in towns for long periods of times) and women managing township life in ways extending way beyond the traditional female domestic responsibilities.

Some of these activities included managing multiple households (as men had many "wives" and "girlfriends"), supplementing family incomes with additional economic activity such as running shebeens and spaza shops and doing sex work. South African men therefore virtually abandoned the sphere of township life management to women in addition to the "usual" division of labour of women running the household.

Even at the other end of the chain of capital accumulation – the sale for profit of the goods made by workers – patriarchy helps capitalism. Women's bodies are used, particularly in the advertising industry, to make money with gender roles in visuals clearly reinforcing stereotypes.

Radical feminists therefore campaign to change the core of society to dissolve patriarchy and to free both women and men from rigid and imposed gender roles. Radical feminists have taken part in every movement against oppression and are noted for being activists in trade unions and social movements.

THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL



THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL:

The Redstocking Manifesto in the USA in 1968 argued that women have been kept from seeing “personal suffering as a political condition. This creates the illusion that a woman’s relationship with her man is a matter of interplay between two unique personalities, and can be worked out individually. In reality, every such relationship is a class relationship, and the conflicts between individual men and women are political conflicts that can only be solved collectively.”

“I spent my whole life worrying about my problems, as if they were only happening to me. I didn’t realise abuse at home, or poverty, were political and could be confronted on that level, instead of by myself at home.”

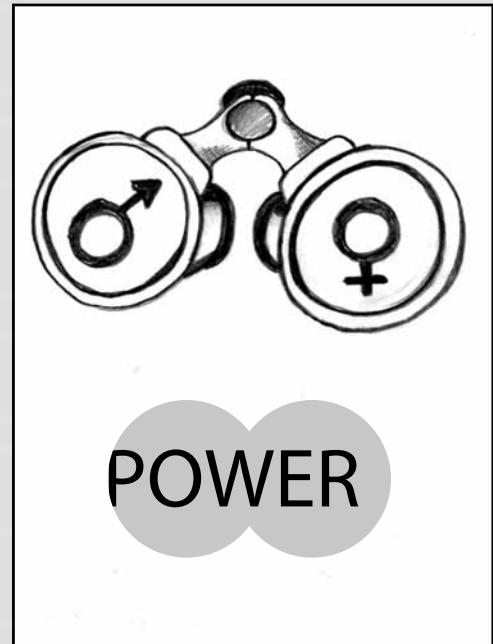
(TAC activist, Mpumalanga)

“The personal is political” spread as a slogan for feminists mobilizing around the idea that women’s suffering was a consequence of a social system that could be changed through collective political action. Movements against race, class and sexual oppression soon saw the value of this battle cry and adopted it from the feminist movement.

GENDER LENSES:

Gender lenses help us see how gender relations give men dominance in society. When we put on our gender lenses, we imagine looking at the world with one eye on how men are treated and one eye on how women are treated, and the relationship between the two. With this awareness we can see that male privilege is not natural, or cast in stone. Gender lenses help us see how male privilege is re-created every day in little and big ways in society, economy, politics, our houses, the media, religion, and so on.

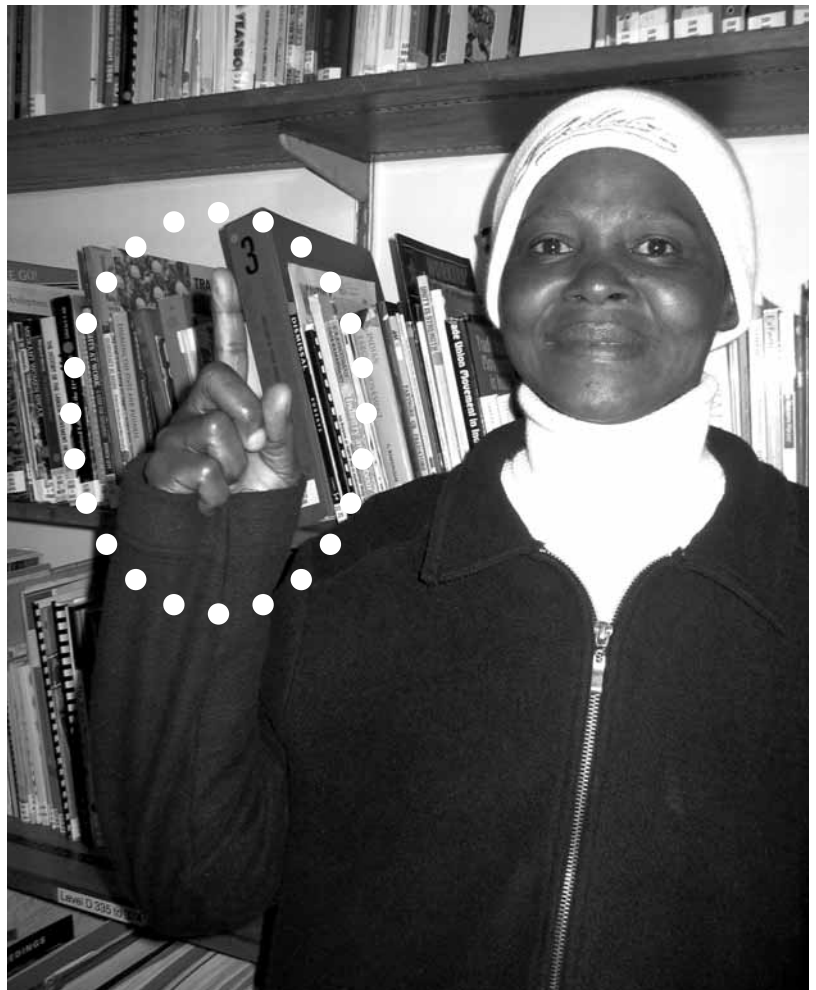
Gender lenses can be used constantly. Every time we reflect on and discuss an issue we should stop for a moment and ask ourselves whether we are taking gender into account. When we put on our gender lenses, we stop and reflect: “How do **power** and **gender** inequalities feature in each issue we discuss and each opinion we put forth?” This opens up different and often unexpected dimensions of whatever subject we are discussing.

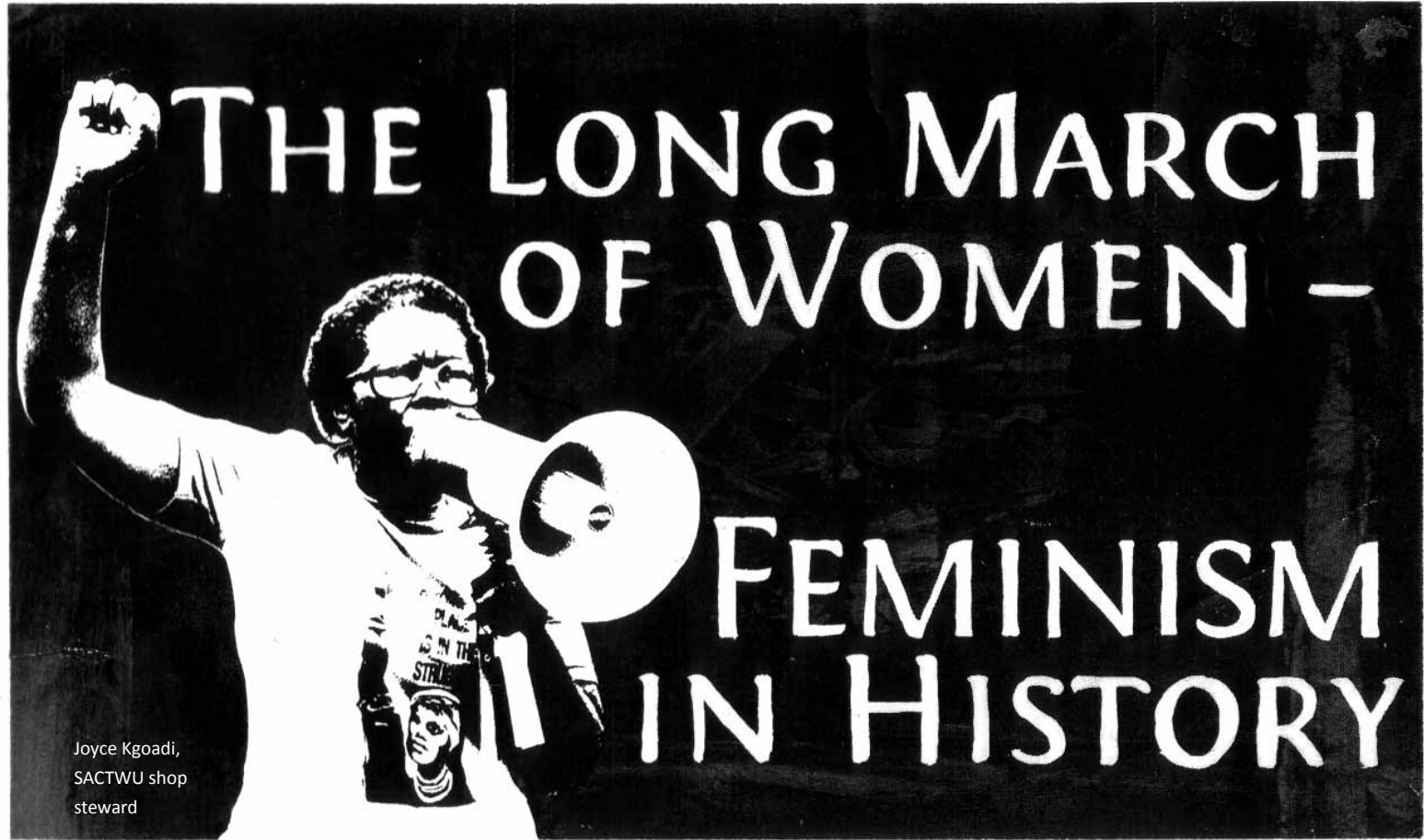


Finger pointing up = **patriarchy**, or as a reminder: remember who the enemy is, as described by feminist activists from Gauteng:

“When we point upwards we are referring to the system of patriarchy under which we live to remind ourselves how it affects the way we act, think and talk.”

This gesture is useful in the midst any meeting or discussion as a way to centralise issues of gender and power.





Joyce Kgoadi,
SACTWU shop
steward

THE LONG MARCH OF WOMEN – FEMINISM IN HISTORY

CHAPTER 2

“Our ideological task as feminists is to understand the system of patriarchy, and our political task is to end it.”

(African Feminist Charter)

Women have actually been struggling for liberation for a very long time. Seeds planted in one generation have often only bloomed in another. Most women who left a mark in the history of this struggle were fiercely unpopular while they were alive and often lived difficult, lonely, outcast lives. And, each surge of feminist mobilisation, each period of victory, has been followed by a backlash.

Across all continents – Europe, North and South America, Africa and Asia – women have had a long history of challenging patriarchy, whether they used this term and called themselves feminists, or not. But the feminist movement – using that name – began in late 19th century Europe.

THE FIRST WAVE

In Europe and Britain socialist movements vigorously critiqued the new industrial order of the 1830s and 40s, and joined with middle-class and working-class movements in the **revolutions of 1848** to extend popular rule. Advocates of women’s emancipation joined these movements and defended women’s right to participate in public life.

A French utopian socialist **Charles Fourier** first used the term “feminism” in the late 19th century, when he was reflecting on how the French Revolution was not just against kings and lords, but also against male domination and white domination. The treatment of

women in society, he said, reflected the degree to which it was “civilised”.

These European revolutions took the monarchies to task, and fought for the vote. But this ended up as democratic rights for men only. It took three generations in Western Europe for women to gain access to their own earnings, education, and the vote, which created an opening for feminists to urge women to claim a place in this new public life.

But it was not just white middle-class women who headed these struggles. Those who spoke at the **Convention for the Liberation of Slaves** – which inspired the French Revolution – were black women. And in 1789, while the men were discussing the new French Constitution, 6000 **sans-culottes women** (laundry women, seamstresses, servants, shop-“girls”, and workers’ “wives”) marched to the Paris town hall to protest the scarcity of food and the cost of bread. Around this time, **Mary Wollstoncraft** was writing about domestic tyranny, marriage as legal prostitution, education, double standards, women born equal and taught to be subordinate, the need for women’s economic self-sufficiency and that women should have political representation.

IN NORTH AMERICA

After the unsuccessful revolutions of 1848, European feminists began to view American

feminists as the leaders of the women’s movement. There **anti-slavery radicalism** fostered the emergence of a women’s rights movement. It drew on conversations and writings of individual women and men talking about women’s rights and emancipation and was an outgrowth of the anti-slavery movements. For example, **Ellen Craft**, a black Anti-Slavery Society activist, was born to a plantation owner who had raped her “house slave”



Ellen Craft, 1848, escaped slavery in the American South, by dressing like a white man and pretending her darker-skinned husband was her slave.

mother at the age of 17. She and her husband, William, ran away with Ellen dressing up like a white man, and William pretending to be her slave. After the civil war she opened a school for black children. **Sojourner Truth** also escaped slavery and then found work in New York as a maid. These women spoke out against racism, and sexism, with Sojourner’s famous words – “**Aint I a woman?**” – inspiring many women to demand justice on the levels of race, class, and gender.

This early mobilising was characterised by the struggle for **women’s suffrage** – political rights and the vote, as citizens. This organised movement of women was met by ridicule from journalists, politicians, and the church alike. Despite hostile reception, including force-feeding for suffragist hunger strikes, this group persevered – calling conferences, delivering speeches and petitions in all urban and rural areas. By the 1860s, **Ernestine Rose**, a Jewish feminist activist who had fled an arranged marriage and joined the movement, reported the first favourable shifts in public opinion which resulted from their hard work, and the legal, education, employment, and property rights of women were increased. In 1920 the American women’s movement won the right to vote for white women.

“Freedom, my friends, does not come from the clouds, like a meteor; it does not bloom in one night; it does not come without great efforts and great sacrifices; all who love liberty, have to labour for it.”

(Ernestine Rose, 1860)

In this period **suffrage organisations** in the USA, Europe and Britain were the chief advocates of women’s rights. In Britain suffragettes like the Pankhurst family fought for the vote and campaigned in the Labour Party and the Communist Party. In the USA suffragists took political direction from **American Indian** activists in their struggle for recognition. In 1878 a delegation of Indigenous Americans went to the White House with “Happy New Year” cards inscribed with extracts from various treaties made with them to show how their rights on paper were being disregarded in

practice. On July 4th that year, the suffragists took cards to the legislature, judiciary and the executive inscribed with sentiments “no taxation without representation” and “governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed”.

INTERNATIONALLY

Also in this period international contact among feminists became more pronounced. The first **international women’s congress**, the Congress International de Droit des Femmes, met in Paris in 1878, and the second met in Washington in 1888, where the International Council of Women was formed. The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, founded in 1874, sponsored its first international conference in 1876, and, with its endorsement of suffrage in 1881, became the largest pro-suffrage organisation in the world.

In **Africa** few records of women’s history have survived colonialism. From those which have survived, we know that women like **Yaa Asantewa** were at the head of movements against British colonialism in Ghana, **Nyeléni** fought for the agricultural self-sufficiency of Malians, **Nana Asmau** was a military icon in Nigeria, **Fatima bint Mohammed ben Feheri** founded a university in 859 in Morocco, while **Nehanda** inspired the Zimbabwean anti-colonial resistance. Some feminists, like Amina Mama and Sally Roesch Wagner, have shown that Native American and African women’s struggles and visions of society inspired European and North American women and contributed to the genesis of modern feminism.

In **India**, Pandita Ramabai, one of the foremost Sanskrit scholars of her generation, wrote a feminist study of Hinduism, called Women’s Religious Law. She travelled the country with her daughter initiating a series of women’s organisations. Mahila Samaj was one of the most influential feminists inside the Indian National Congress. In **Indonesia** Raden Ajen Kartini spoke out against polygamy, forced marriage, and colonial oppression, and argued for women’s rights to education. She started a girl’s school of 125 students, but, like more



than 30% of women bearing children at the time, died in childbirth in her late 20s.

In **China** the Chinese Suffragette Society in Beijing, led by Tan Junying, mobilised women’s demonstrations to picket National Assembly meetings in 1911.

In **Japan** Kishida Toshiko led the 19th century campaigns for women’s rights while the campaign for suffrage began in 1917. “The feminist “bluestocking” group Seitoscha published a magazine, Seito (1911–16), with articles on marriage, culture, women’s rights and suffrage.

Australian women founded the Australian Women’s Political Association in 1909 and campaigned for equal pay. The vote for white women was won that year. Aboriginal women only got the vote in 1967.

The first **Latin American** women’s congress was held in Argentina in 1910 and in 1918 a Feminist Party was established with 11000 campaigning for the right to vote.

The **Russian revolution** of 1917 can also be seen as an important part of feminist history – it was started on Women’s Day by women workers. Organisations of women vehemently opposed the First World War, including socialist feminists like **Alexandra Kollantai** who joined Lenin’s Bolshevik party and fled to the USA. In February 1917, after the revolution, she returned to Russia, and argued that women’s issues **could not wait** until after civil war, or after famine. She lobbied within the Party for female suffrage, legal equality, free divorce, free abortion, maternity leave, workplace and community crèches, the criminalisation of wife-beating, education campaigns against the



“If you men of Ashanti will not go forward, then we will. We the women will. I will call upon my fellow women. We will fight the white men until the last of us falls on the battlefields.”

Ashanti leader, Yaa Asantewa, 1900, in response to demands by the British Colonial Governor, Lord Hodgson.



In Nicaragua, the Sandanista's overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in 1979

veil and the seclusion of women, paid nursing breaks for breast-feeding working women, and for house communes.

THE END OF THE FIRST WAVE

World War I, like many nationalist struggles, divided the women's movement and turned many feminists into patriots. Then with the global economic collapse preceding World War II, feminism itself seemed drained of energy. Millions of women entered the paid work force during WWII in factory jobs vacated by soldiers and then were threatened with retrenchment after the war. Middle-class leaderships won out when attempted revolutions failed and they generally limited or denied women's participation in the new European governments.

Stalinism, from the 1920s, was a serious **backlash** against Bolshevik feminist reforms. So whilst women could still vote, anti-divorce, anti-abortion, and anti-homosexuality laws were passed. Women were awarded the 'Order of Maternal Glory' for having seven or more children and thus relegated back to the home.

THE SECOND WAVE BEGINS

The first signs of feminist reawakening came after the Second World War, and by the 1960s,

a new feminist movement was underway. Like the earlier women's struggles these feminisms were linked to other struggles for human emancipation, and took inspiration from the anti-war movement, the civil rights movement, the socialist movement and the national liberation struggles in the Third World.

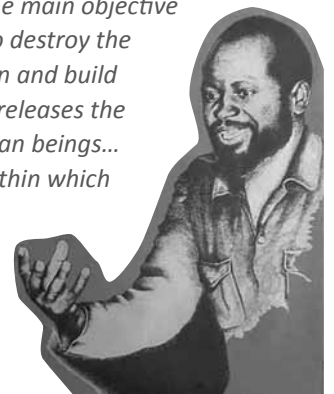
For example, revolutions occurring in Latin America saw changes in women's status in countries like Nicaragua where feminist ideology during the Sandinista Revolution was largely responsible for the significant improvements to the quality of life for women.

By 1970 there were hundreds of journals and newspapers devoted to women's issues in the USA and many challenges to laws that discriminated on the basis of sex. The focus on how sexism works in a capitalist society brought issues of race and working-class oppression to the forefront. Some women in the movement were professional women, dissatisfied with their lack of opportunity, and they espoused a kind of liberal feminism, campaigning for equality with men in employment, law, education, and politics. Others coming out of the anti-war and civil rights movement were more radical. They focused on larger goals of liberating women from stereotypes and reshaping sexist institutions.

The new wave of feminism also expressed itself within the national liberation struggles in Asia and Africa:

"The emancipation of women is not an act of charity, the result of a humanitarian or compassionate attitude. The liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the revolution, the guarantee of its continuity and the precondition for its victory. The main objective of the revolution is to destroy the system of exploitation and build a new society which releases the potentialities of human beings... This is the context within which women's emancipation arises"

(Samora Machel, assassinated leader of FRELIMO, Mozambique)



But struggles for **socialism, without feminism**, in Africa left women in the cold in the post-colonial era. And **feminism without socialism** in the North, left poor and working-class women disappointed. It has become clear to black women and their revolutionary allies in struggle that they were never going to have equality within the existing white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Moreover, it also has become clear that sexism did not end for white women who moved up the class ladder either.

The **Combahee River Collective**, a black feminist group in the USA in the 1970s, took its name from the guerrilla actions and zero tolerance for sexism, of **Harriet Tubman** to free slaves during the American Civil War in the 1800s. They were disillusioned by the lack of anti-racist work of white women, and lack of anti-sexist work of black men. They argued for the importance of ending capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy in order to liberate all oppressed people. They said:

“We are socialist because we believe that work must be organised for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation.”



Audre Lorde: lesbian feminist writer and activist



Barbara Smith: member of Combahee River Collective

So they argued for an understanding of class that takes position into account the specific racial and sexual oppression of black women, which are significant determinants in their daily lives.

All these struggles all over the world, and over so many years, show that the struggle for women’s liberation has a long history. This struggle has also been fought in South Africa.

STRUGGLES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Women in South Africa were active in the struggles against colonialism and racial capitalism for more than 100 years. They fought side-by-side with men against apartheid laws, for the vote and against capitalist exploitation. But they also fought struggles as women experiencing unique oppression. They formed organisations to take forward their struggles. Not all of these organisations and struggles can be called feminist in the way we use the term here, but they were part of the legacy of a women’s movement that continues in our struggles today.

In Natal and the Transvaal in **1912 Indian women** fought against the elitism of the Indian Congress and were the first to defy the anti-Asiatic laws, which banned Indian people from the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Within one year of the formation of the ANC (in 1913) African women formed the **Bantu Women’s League** to fight the pass laws – even though these laws had not been extended to them. And, despite apartheid, one of the first multi-racial organisations was the **Federation of South African Women (FSAW)**, formed in the 1920s at a time when white women – along

with all black people – still did not have the right to vote.

FSAW became known as FEDSAW in the 1950s and, with the increased number of black women in cities, and the regime's desire to force African women to carry passes, played the leading role in the strikes against the pass laws. FEDSAW organised the famous march of 20 000 women to the then prime minister, Strydom, in Pretoria on 9 August 1956.

...THE 1970S

After Sharpeville, and the banning of all the liberation movements in the 1960s, mass struggles were crushed. The first signs of revival came in the form of the **black consciousness movement** of the 1970s and the strikes of

workers in **Durban in 1973**. One of the first organisations to emerge from this period was the **Black Women's Federation (BWF)**. Within a year, seven leading BWF women were detained and in October 1977, the BWF was banned by the apartheid state.

During the 1970s and 1980s, waves of apartheid restructuring policies categorised over 100 000 African people in the Western Cape as "illegals", who were forcibly removed from their homes through raids and violent demotions, causing them to flee to overcrowded Bantustans, or become "squatters" in informal and vulnerable settlements far from town. Without passes or formal employment, African women were the primary targets of these operations, which were justified with a host of laws around influx control. **Women in Crossroads** used many strategies for **resisting forced removals** – from collective direct action, to theatre, to legal battles, to solidarity campaigns. Refusing to leave their shacks in town and returning illegally despite multiple violent "removals" by the State, they spearheaded a struggle for tenure rights in the Western Cape that continues today.

Women were also active in the new labour movement of the 1970s and female activists like **Emma Mashinini** were pivotal in the formation of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union (CCAWUSA), which later became SACCAWU. Activists in both CCAWUSA and SACCAWU fought for feminist politics within the union and argued that the labour movement should take up women's issues. CCAWUSA started the first struggle in South Africa to have **maternity rights**, winning an important battle with OK Bazaars in 1983 forcing the company to grant **maternity leave**. This victory strengthened the hand of feminists in the union who began to conduct workshops and discussions about gender and developing women's leadership and began to voice the idea that childcare should be the joint responsibility of women and men.

As a result, SACCAWU won an important feminist victory in 1988 winning their demands





Forced removals, Crossroads 1970s

for **parental rights**. Workers from Pick & Pay and OK Bazaars mobilised and convinced the majority of workers that parental, and not just maternity leave, was essential. They gathered personal experiences from workers and approached management with clear aims and objectives. But even their male comrades had to be convinced to see the need:

“We still have male comrades who don’t see a need to stay with their wives when they are on maternity leave...80% need something like a wheelbarrow to get them to see the need.”

(Evelyne Maseko, Shop Steward and national Negotiator for Diskom)

Through threatening to strike they won an agreement with Pick & Pay, which gave women **nine months’ maternity leave paid at 75%**. Fathers also got eight days paid leave during the time of birth. These agreements did not come easily – they had to be struggled for.

“It was a hell of a struggle. We negotiated the whole day and half the night...Workers demonstrated at lunch time during negotiations. The bosses threatened to withdraw fringe benefits like the end of year bonus.”

(Sipho Masuku, SACCAWU Negotiator at 3M)

In the 1980s women in the Western Cape formed the **United Women’s Organisation (UWO)**, whilst, elsewhere in the country, women activists formed the **United Women’s Congress (UWCO)**. UWO was an important component of the mass movement, the **United Democratic Front (UDF)**, in the Cape and linked women activists in community struggles and in trade unions.

...THE 1990S

While not necessarily part of the national women’s movement, squatter women were at the forefront of resistance to forced removals in the Western Cape and the sexist backlash to their activism has had serious repercussions for women’s leadership today.

For example, women in Crossroads in the 1990s organised again along gender lines, confronting the state, demanding a voice in their lives. In 1998 they staged a four month sit-in challenging local government to access decent **housing**, and social services like water, electricity, sewage, education, health care. In both the apartheid and post-apartheid women’s organising there have been serious punitive repercussions for women leaders and their families, as well as for gender-based organising that challenges power dynamics in the area – ongoing struggles over housing in the area is one case in point.

COSATU unions, such as SACCAWU, continued to fight for **parental rights** with employers but within COSATU there was also a struggle for **quotas** to be established to ensure that women were in leadership positions. Despite the fact that the Federation did not accept these proposed resolutions, it’s September



Joyce Kgoadi: “I could not come home from the same factory, doing the same work, and then he [my husband] sits down and reads the newspaper. I just felt there is something wrong here. He did not take kindly to my late hours and weekend meetings as a shop steward. I said tough luck, either you understand what I am doing or we part ways.”

Commission of 1997 did make extensive recommendations on **women's leadership** and drafted demands that unions could make in order to champion women's issues in the workplace.

Meanwhile, soon after the 1994 elections some activists together with COSATU called for a **Women's Budget**, whilst others campaigned for improved child welfare grants and formed a **New Women's Movement** out of this campaign. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s feminists continued to produce a publication *Agenda* which attempted to stimulate debates in the movement about women's struggles.

In South Africa, in the 1980s there was much debate around the relationship between women's liberation, and national liberation – should the primary focus of women's organising be to increase the number of women into a male-dominated anti-apartheid struggle or into a women's movement?

For many activists the common goal of resisting apartheid led to a **"hierarchy of rights"** with ending apartheid at the top, then class emancipation and gender equality. These goals were seen as either something that would be achieved automatically with ending apartheid, or issues that would be dealt with at a later stage. This was often used as a tactic to stop "women's issues" from being put on the agenda. Women activists were told that their issues would be "dealt with later on".

Often when women's groups within and outside the UDF challenge sexism and women's



THE ANC ON THE WOMEN QUESTION:



The dominant position in the ANC until the late 1980s was that women's emancipation was secondary and contingent upon national liberation.

RADICAL FEMINIST POSITIONS:

Some radical feminists argued that male-dominated movements cannot be trusted to advance women's position, Socialist feminists argued that women's struggles should be linked but women should maintain internal control over decision-making. Women's organisations needed to be informed by a kind of feminism that didn't lose sight of class and race differences that produce different interests among women.

oppression, raised issues of power imbalances between women and men, gender-based violence and reproductive rights, other activists would claim that these issues were about western, white and middle-class values, and seen as distracting attention from the “real” struggle.

“This view shaped the extent to which women’s organisations could legitimately raise issues related to sexuality, reproductive rights and bodily integrity within the confines of what was considered by the liberation leadership to be ‘political.’”

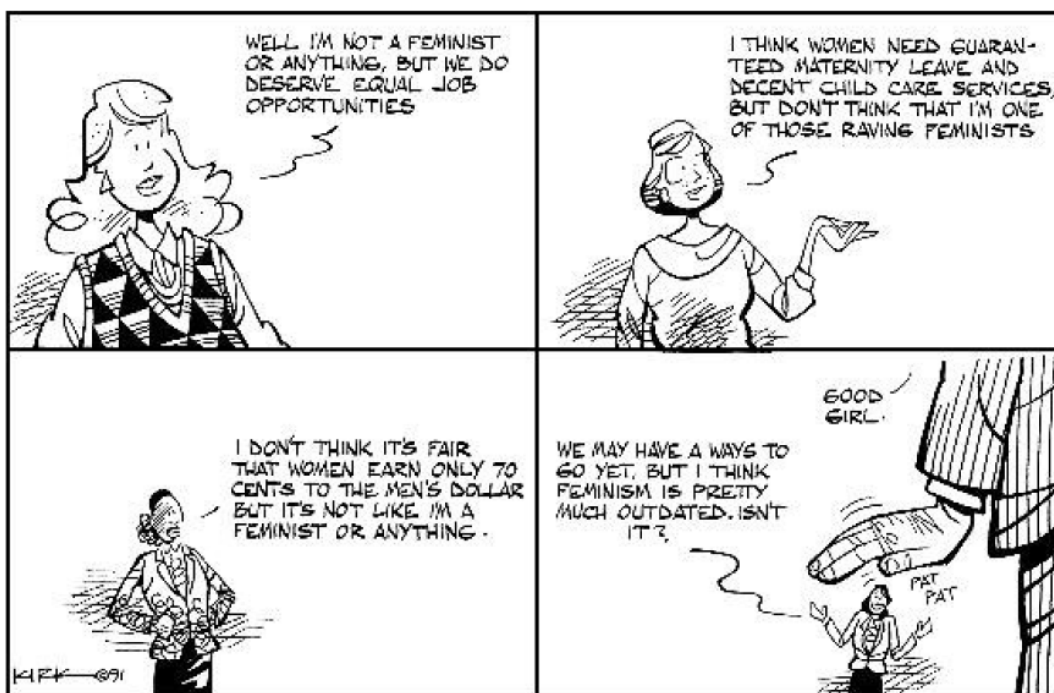
(Shireen Hassim, South African political analyst)

Men dominated the leadership of the UDF, and feminism was not on the agenda of its affiliates. Thus, while women were at the forefront of the struggle, their collective agency did not extend to challenging gendered power relations. Instead nationalists within the movement tended to label women as mothers or sisters, subordinated to men in the struggle. They were seen as “bearers of culture” rather than agents of change in their own right. This effectively meant that **women’s struggle was two-fold:** against the oppression of the apartheid government and against the oppression of their own male comrades. Yet, many women

managed to take on the roles as prominent organisers on the ground, and some also rose to leadership in the liberation movement.

After 1994, large numbers of middle-class gender activists left the women’s movement and moved into government, business and NGOs. Many accepted the political dispensation as legitimate and saw their task as adding women to structures or making legislation more “women-friendly”. They could not stop the growing instances of neo-liberalism and the effects these were having on the majority of women. The trade unions grappled with the tension of struggling to defend workers against the neo-liberalism of the new ANC government and yet being involved in the Tripartite Alliance with the ANC. As a result COSATU tended to have less of a profile for fighting issues beyond the workplace, including championing women’s liberation. The political settlement and the defeat of the mass movement led to a de-link between the women’s movement and working-class women’s struggles and left women interested in feminist issues isolated from the broader working class.

As a result there are four main strands of the women’s movement post-1994. Two of these strands are within the present neo-liberal order.

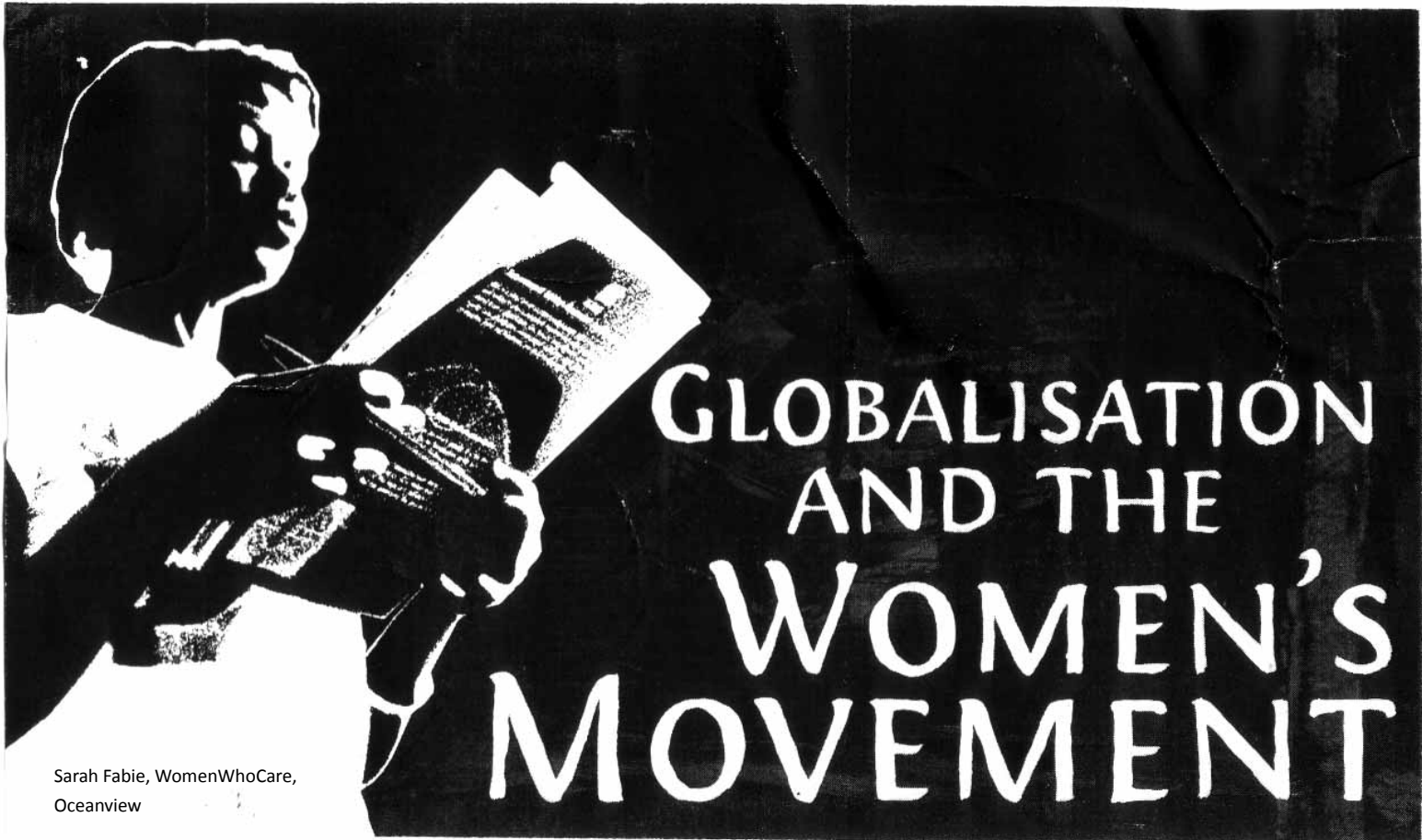


These include women in the Parliament and the Women's League of the ruling ANC, as well as NGOs involved in advocacy and lobbying work. In 2006 women parliamentarians announced the formation of a Progressive Women's Movement of South Africa (PWMSA) on the

occasion of Women's Day. Outside this elite there are two strands closer to the experience of working-class women – women's structures in the labour movement, and, since 2001, the new social movements.



Zille-raine Heights and Civic Road activists prepare to defend their informal settlements, 2007



Sarah Fabie, WomenWhoCare,
Oceanview

GLOBALISATION AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

CHAPTER 3

For a long period after the Second World War capitalism operated in a form known as **Keynesianism**. In this period capitalists continued to make profits but within the combination of a welfare state, regulated capital and labour markets and fixed exchange rates. Within these arrangements workers in many countries successfully struggled for full employment, strong trade unions and extensive public services.

Because women were active in these struggles they enjoyed many benefits from this form of welfare capitalism, which spread everywhere. Women in Europe and America entered the workplace in vastly increased numbers. Many women became more financially independent and enjoyed the provision of public services such as public education, healthcare, transport etc., both for themselves but also as relief from having to take full responsibility for providing these services to men and children.

These benefits were even enjoyed by some women in Africa, Latin America and Asia

– after a wave of independence struggles led to newly independent countries after World War II. Many of these Third World governments attempted to use the state as a developmental tool for economic independence and social upliftment. Although many of these attempts were sabotaged by Cold War politics and coups, a kind of welfarism nevertheless did exist under which some women gained a certain amount of mobility, gained paid work, and the benefits of public health, education and transport. This was so, although on a racial discriminatory basis, even in apartheid South Africa.

But from the **1960s and early 1970s** the capitalist world started experiencing declining profit rates and entered a phase of crisis marked by over-production and over-accumulation. Surpluses generated could not be invested in ways that ensured profitable returns on an expanded scale. Mainstream economists agreed that markets, internationally, were saturated and investors were often forced to sit on surplus money without profitable sources for investment. And



so a quite **fundamental change took place in capitalism in the 1980s**. Capitalism sought a way out of this impasse and attempted to restructure social relations internationally in order to return to sustained profitability. This restructuring of the world has come to be called **globalisation** and its ideology, neo-liberalism.

South Africa experienced this in the form of the government's Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) Strategy imposed in 1996.

This restructuring of the world would not have been possible without the historical defeat of all popular and working-class movements, including the women's movement. All hard-earned gains by social movements over 100 years, including the **feminist movement, came under attack in the 1980s**. Globalisation targeted the hard earned gains made by women everywhere and unleashed an onslaught against any radical mobilisation, depoliticising popular struggles and promoting a backlash in the media towards feminism.

Some of the specific ways in which globalisation attacked women were:

- Privatising and commercialising public services
- Changing the workplace
- Attacking women's collective struggles ideologically.

COMMERCIALISATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN

Globalisation and its commodification of services ensured devastating cut-backs on the range, scale, quality, accessibility and viability of public services. Thereby it has **increased the load on women** for what has become an expanded version of the domestic sphere for services – water collection, extended childcare and health care, cooking with more labour intensive energy forms and labour intensive foods, walking greater distances to access resources etc.

Government policies of trade liberalisation have been combined with the neo-liberal approach of **cost recovery** in regard to welfare and services. As a result subsidies and budgets to local authorities are cut. They in turn apply the pressure on local residents, who in many instances are the same women who have lost their jobs through factory closures or retrenchments.

"It is mainly women that use water and electricity for cooking and caring for our families. When water and electricity supplies are cut off it is women who take on the burden of looking for alternative sources since women in most of our families are expected to take care of their families."

(TAC member, Mitchells Plain, 19/08/04)

Rural women, for example, are required to walk several kilometres in order to get water from natural sources like rivers. Where there are communal taps, women are expected to cart

up to 25 litres on their heads daily. Add AIDS to the picture, where it takes 24 buckets of water a day to care for someone with the virus, and women's loads are quadrupled. The physical cost borne by women is never "recovered".

Particularly with the AIDS crisis, the withdrawal of the state from providing proper health care has placed the burden onto the shoulders of women. Caring for the sick and elderly is a

responsibility given to women. This form of **reproductive labour** goes unrecognised and unpaid. In the end not only do women tend to the sick but they also look after orphaned HIV-infected babies who have lost their mothers due to the government's refusal to supply anti-retroviral medication to pregnant women, or consider alternatives (like sperm-washing) to people with the virus who want to conceive children.

GLOBALISATION, GENDER AND AIDS

If there was a recipe for creating an AIDS epidemic in Southern Africa it would read as follows:

Steal some land and subjugate its people. Take some men from rural areas and put them in hostels far away from home in different countries if need be. Build excellent roads. Ensure that the communities surrounding the men are impoverished so that a ring of sex workers develops around each mining town. Add HIV. Now take some miners and send them home for holidays to their rural and uninfected wives. Add a few "girlfriends" in communities along the road home.

Add liberal amounts of patriarchy – both home-grown and the colonial variety. Ensure that women have no right to determine the conditions under which sex will take place. Make sure that they have no access to credit, education or any of the measures that would give them options to leave unhappy unions or dream of lives in which men are not the centre of their activities. Shake well and watch an epidemic explode.

There's an optional part of the recipe that I'd like to tell you about. It adds an extra spice to the pot: African countries on average spend four times more on debt servicing than they do on health. Throw in a bit of World Bank propaganda, some loans from the IMF, and beat well. Voila. We have icing on the cake.

(Sisonke Msimang, AWID, 2002)



THE WORKPLACE, LIVELIHOODS AND WOMEN

At work there is a greater feminisation of labour as women are forced into waged work in greater number. But faced with squeezing greater profits out of workers the capitalists are setting women's "cheap" labour up against men, making them work flexibly, irregularly and in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) exempt from national labour laws, and sweatshops.

In the workplace it is women who are used as casual labour, who are forced to do homework for big companies and who are the first to be retrenched because they are not deemed to be breadwinners.

Globalisation attacks the poor, and over 70% of poor people in South Africa are women and children. Across Southern Africa, people's livelihoods and ability to support their family are being violently demolished. In Zimbabwe it was Murambatsvina; in Zambia thousands of informal traders were cleared out of the city centres in March 2007; and in Cape Town the police demolish "illegal" "structures. In all cases, **poor women are at the front lines** and we know women have always borne the brunt of these forced relocations and regional "orderly urbanisation" clean-up operations.

BACKLASH: THE IDEOLOGICAL ATTACK ON THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

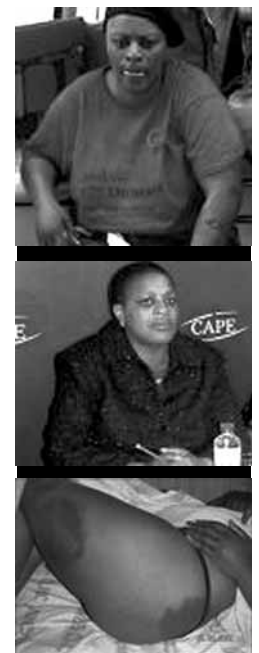
In Zimbabwe, women had participated in the 15 year-long liberation struggle, during which they challenged the image of subservient mothers and daughters. After independence in 1980s there was little room to justify discrimination against women. The 1980s were full of legal changes and the establishment of a Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs. Between 1985 and 1995 women mobilised to challenge patriarchal



legislation which tolerated the abuse of women. Over 25 organisations were started – focusing on sexism in the media and in law, to research on AIDS and violence against women. Within this women's movement there was a range of understandings about sexism as a political struggle. Some were radical feminist in their orientation and others more liberal in their approach.

After the Zimbabwean government accepted the IMF's Structural Adjustment Program in 1995, the state became more authoritarian and women's activism became more difficult. Women activists became targets of **state-sponsored violence**. During assaults on the political opposition in March 2007, feminist activists, Sekai Holland and Grace Kwinje, were accused as being "whores of Tsvangirai [MDC leader] and prostitutes of Bush and Blair".

An anti-feminist reaction to gains made in the 1970s dominated the 1980s in North America and Europe. This **backlash** argued that any problems "liberated" women were having were because of feminism. They pointed to how professional women faced burnout, an infertility epidemic, a shortage of men for single women and depressed children



Grace Kwinjeh



Sekai Holland

without fathers. The 1980s thus saw a retreat in public support and funding for rape crisis centres, women's health facilities, shelters, and retraction of funding for abortion to the poor.

With women under attack for supposedly "going too far" many feminists posed the question:

"If American women are so equal, why do they represent two thirds of all poor adults? Why are nearly 75 percent of full time working women making less than [half] of men? Why are they still far more likely than men to live in poor housing and receive no health insurance, and twice as likely to draw no pension? Why does the average working woman's salary still lag as far behind the average man's as it did twenty years ago? Why does the average female college graduate today earn less than a man with no more than a high school diploma?"

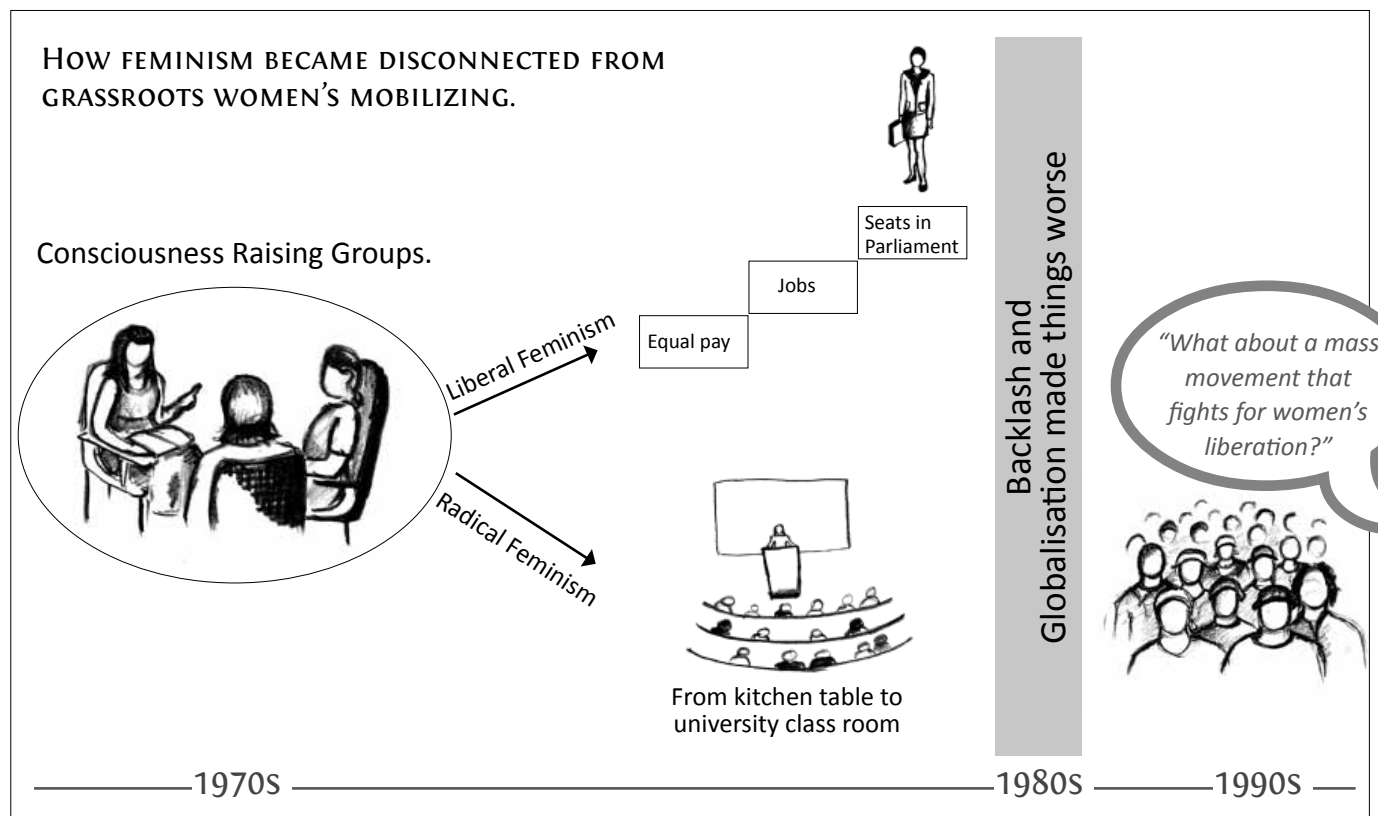
(Susan Faludi)

For others in the West in the 1990s, "lifestyle" feminism became a lifestyle "choice" devoid of all radical politics. **Lifestyle-based feminism** does not threaten oppressive social set ups and critique competition. It is a "style" for sale

in fashion magazines that define "free" and "powerful" women, and has little to do with the clear-cut goal of ending sexist oppression. Sisterhood, which was so crucial at the onset of the movement, became devoid of meaning because the class hierarchy meant that privileged women were benefiting from the oppression of largely black and poor women, which spat in the face of the basic principles of feminism.

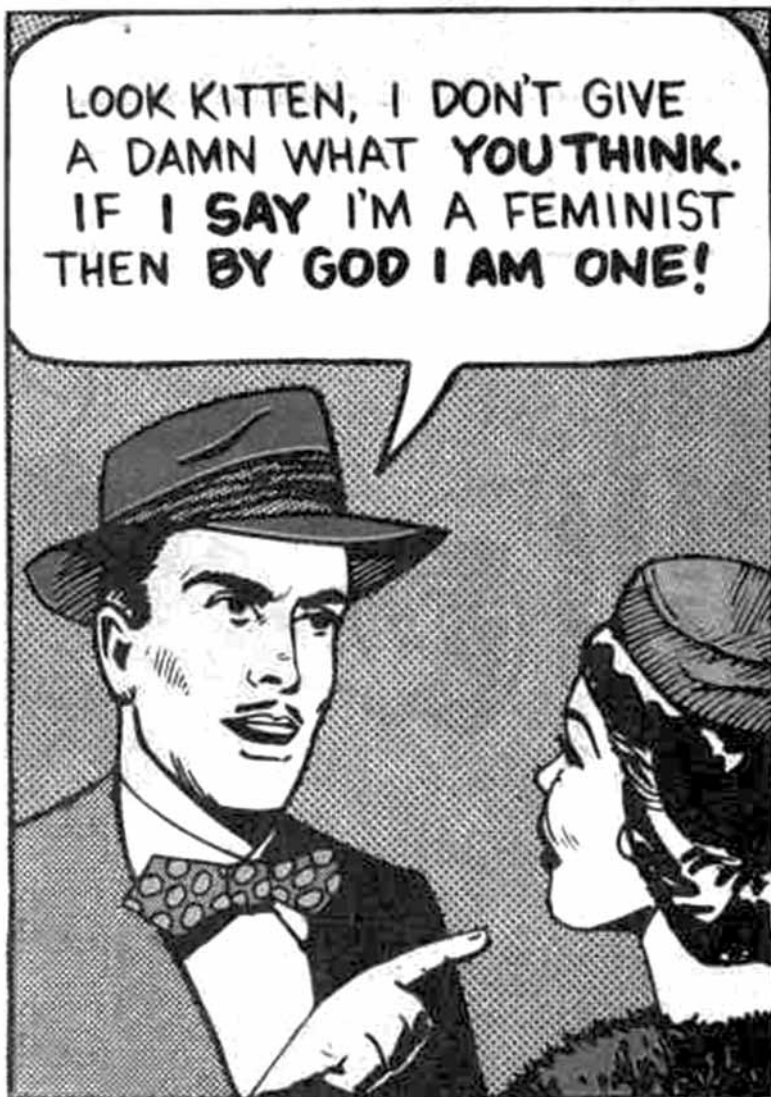


In Africa, as the IMF and the World Bank began tightening the neo-liberal screws on governments via Structural Adjustment Programmes, many African leaders became more authoritarian. And women were the first to experience this authoritarian backlash.



Many African governments began to use a counter-revolutionary, cultural-nationalist language portraying all women's organising as "feminist" and therefore "un-African" and "pro-imperialist". Women who worked for women's organisations were stereotyped as "those who want to convince you to leave your husband, so that she can take him for herself". In other places, this backlash was not always loud and clear – in fact, pretty language replaced militant politics from India to Brazil and South Africa.

Gender became "**mainstreamed**", with many "women's empowerment" NGOs. This could



Benbrook

have been a good thing – if it meant that sexism was challenged in all realms, not just in token women's committees. But instead, it has resulted in a **depoliticisation of feminist politics** and many feminists ended up in universities rather than in active struggles. Donor-driven and neo-liberal state-friendly NGOs began to speak nice gender-friendly language to win contracts. Real struggles against poverty, inequality, and unemployment – which affect women more than men – became removed from "feminist" agendas.

In the context of the backlash under globalisation, many feminists retreated into the universities where academic legitimacy of women's studies had been considered to be a victory for feminist thought in the 1970s. But suddenly feminist thinking became **exclusive**. The universities became increasingly conservative and corporatised – excluding women and men outside the university, who were no longer considered an important audience. Those radical theorists who disappeared into academia continued to do valuable work, but often spent their days adopting professional behaviour in dealing with the mainstream, and women's organisations replicated existing hierarchical institutions. As a result, feminist thinking became **de-linked** from consciousness-raising activities and the feminist movement in which it was originally born. Feminism became estranged from the experiences of working-class people and appeared to be the domain of the intellectuals. It became depoliticised. And the key contributions of feminism to left politics were erased.

So feminist ideas stagnated and the backlash and challenges to feminism grew. We faced the **NGOisation** and **deradicalisation** of most official "women's" spaces. There was much work to be done if feminism was to play its important role in struggles for social justice in the 21st century.

RADICAL FEMINISM TODAY

Wendy Pekeur,
feminist
farmworker
unionist & activist

CHAPTER 4

Globalisation attacked all the hard-earned gains by social movements of the last 100 years, including the gains made by the women's movement. But today globalisation is itself in a crisis – floundering in its attempts to increase profits on the backs of women and the working class. United States imperialism is overstretched and struggles to force its military will on Iraq and other countries. A global justice movement has emerged linking new working-class and land-based social movements, environmental activists and radical forums like the World Social Forum. In parts of Latin America new social movements have also brought governments into power with a mandate to break with neo-liberalism and US imperialism.

In some instances this new tide of struggles in the world, and the anti-imperialist stance of some governments in Latin America, have brought gains for women and a new energy into women's struggles.



In **Venezuela**, the President, Hugo Chávez, proclaimed in 2006, that women heads of households would receive 380 000 Venezuelan Bolívares per month (\$185) for domestic work. This is about 80% of the minimum wage in Venezuela. This amount would be paid by the state.



FEMINISM IN LATIN AMERICA

Gina Vargas, Peruvian
feminista

Over many years feminism has focused on the issue of women's unpaid and unvalued domestic work. This includes activities such as washing, cooking,

shopping, rearing children, cleaning and caring for the sick and aged. In short the emotional and physical welfare of people – that contribute to a 'successful' capitalist society. Feminists have argued the need for a domestic wage, for men to share in duties and for women's work to be accounted for in national Budgets and to be part of trade union demands.

The achievement of payment for domestic labour is hard won. Women's organisations had been fighting for this constitutional amendment since 1999 but the victory was only achieved in 2006. This wage for housewives in Venezuela is an example of how feminists can make concrete

gains that both improve the practical lives of women as well as challenge the patriarchal value system. Coming after so many years of neo-liberal setbacks this is a huge victory for women everywhere.

In **Brazil**, women's police stations have been opened to provide better legal support, advocacy, and protection of women. Women's police stations were first opened in the country in 1985. They aimed to provide a more secure and sympathetic atmosphere where victims could report

crimes, most commonly battering, rape, and incest. If injured, the victims receive medical treatment immediately. Policewomen then perform the usual tasks of officers of the law, from taking statements to making arrests. Women still are able to go to regular police stations but women-only police stations are just another option.

In **Argentina**, women formed a Housewives Trade Union to fight for paid work in the home as a fundamental part of the women's rights movement. The Sindicato de Amas de Casade Santa Fe (The Housewives Trade Union of Santa Fe) emerged in the context of an economic crisis in Argentina. On 19 and 20 December 2001, women flooded the streets, banging pots and pans to protest against the bankrupt Argentinean economy and a decade of government corruption, sales of public utilities, and systematic destruction of industries. The Housewives Trade Union organised its grassroots base of 1 500 members to fill public squares with women bringing urgent demands for daily necessities such as food and clothing. Members took control of the neighbourhood health centre for victims of domestic violence, shopped collectively for food to get lower prices, and ran a soup kitchen for more than 200 children.

In **Mexico** Zapatista women are also attacking the roots of patriarchy and neo-liberal capitalism. The Zapatista indigenous peoples' uprising began on 1 January 1994, and fought against inequality and social injustice, demanding economic reform and social change in the Mexican state. The Zapatista movement soon became seen as one of the most revolutionary movements in the world. Challenging gender oppression is seen as a root of the Zapatista uprising and not just a token issue and women have contributed greatly to the revolution. The Zapatista women issued The Women's Revolutionary Act, which made a list of claims by indigenous and mestizo women, and reflected the needs and vision of women everywhere.



What started as an initiative of 70 000 most women teachers protesting around education and state repression in May 2006, spread to a popular front of the people of Oaxaca- who took over local government in Mexico until October that year. A 13 hour military battle ousted them, but their movement and demands have grown to include the fight for socialisation of land and water resources.



AFRICA

In **Ghana**, an African Feminist Charter was written in November 2006 by over 100 African feminist activists from the region and diaspora at the African Feminist Forum in Accra. The Charter sets out collective values that can guide the work and lives of African feminists.

After the backlash of the early 1990s, a feminist vision motivated women in **Zimbabwe** to organise again towards the end of the decade. Like in the 1980s, this politicisation of women came at a cost of state repression. The Zimbabwean Women's Charter exemplified women's persistent challenge to patriarchy through the formulation of a women's agenda and women's political representation. Women are today at the forefront of confronting the Mugabe regime, as individuals and in organisations such as Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), and the Feminist Political Education Project (FPEP).

The FPEP is not a consolidated organisation but a loose network of women coming out of the women's movement's experiences within the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). With an urgent need to do something different to the mainstream, they decided to "support people to come together and find solutions for themselves", says Shereen Essof. They have organised a leadership seminar for young women touching on the links between law, policy, culture, tradition, violence and women, as well as on leadership in Zimbabwe today, and understandings of sexuality, reproductive

health and patriarchy. They engage in advocacy work and campaigns and have produced a book recording women's experiences of Operation Murbambatsvina (Clean out the Filth), which left up to a million people homeless in 2005.

"The space for organising began to shrink under the Mugabe regime. Feminist is a dangerous word... We decided we would pool our skills and resources and come up with interventions based on what was happening at a particular time in the country and create spaces for women to come together both to share and reflect but also to think through ways of doing organising and in the limited room that exists in Zimbabwe right now."

(Shereen Essof)



Shereen Essof, Zimbabwean feminist





In **Kenya**, women's specific demands for communal land and autonomous production during the 1952–1960 Mau Mau war were compromised away during negotiations which led to independence. But since 2000 there has been a resurgence involving the same social forces and some of the same people. A new social movement has been involved in over 50 land occupations and instances of armed and unarmed defences of land from enclosure. At the frontline of the new Mau Mau are peasant and landless women. They demand communal land titles, universal, free education and producer control of trade. This has become an international campaign.

In **South Africa**, seasonal women farmworkers have formed a trade union – Sikhula Sonke – which they call a social movement union. The union is explicitly feminist and aims to challenge both patriarchy and capitalism, break the personal/private divide, and take politics into “the home” as well as the “work” place. The organisation has a political critique of sexism at its centre. The feminisation of labour and poverty are linked and women are still the poorest and most marginalised, making up 70% of people living in poverty. Sikhuhla Sonke attempts to address both women's practical needs and to challenge patriarchy. They have both male and female members. They, along



Francis Davis (Photo by Jurgen Schadeberg)

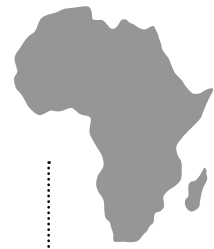
Francis Davis aged 14. She is from a farm in the Western Cape. At age 14 she was forced to leave school and home to go look for work on a farm. This photo was chosen for the cover of a publication “Still Searching for Security”, that showed that land has not changed hands in post-apartheid South Africa and that more farm dwellers have been evicted in the ten years since apartheid than the ten before 1994. Francis was offered assistance to continue to study. She declined, stating that she did not see the purpose of doing so. Against such odds Sikhula Sonke women are courageously facing the harsh realities for women and girls worn down by unemployment, eviction, alcoholism and associated gender violence, and offering unity in struggle for the possibility of another reality.

with Women on Farms, have both a practical and strategic focus – lobbying government, challenging multinational corporations and addressing the issues facing farm workers whilst defining themselves as a women-led organisation.

All over the world in the most recent period, women are today once again organising within their communities and challenging oppressive policies in response to the increased economic, social and environmental pressures of patriarchal neo-liberal globalisation.

Organising shifts in this new context and women’s movements appear in ways not necessarily familiar. This organising may be small and localised. It may not be “mass”, it may not immediately be winning concrete “gains”. It may not, on first glance, be

acknowledged as feminist by those with the power to decree. But the organising of poor and working-class women presents a very real challenge to social and labour movements in terms of reclaiming a revolutionary feminist activism, and in terms of rethinking all our assumptions about women’s organising and challenging dominant oppressive institutions.



FEMINISM IN AFRICA



Sikhula Sonke Annual Congress 2006



HOW DO WE MAKE OUR ORGANISATIONS MORE FEMINIST?

Siphokazi Mthathi, feminist AIDS activist

CHAPTER 5

“We have a vision of the trade union movement as a home for women workers, a movement which they know will fight for justice for women in the workplace and the economy. This will forge a movement for gender equality in the labour market, and must be seen as an integral part of our vision of a strong COSATU, politically and economically.

None of this can be achieved without taking into account the unequal division of labour in the household and ensuring that COSATU fights for socially provided childcare facilities and equal participation in household labour. We have a vision of a trade union movement that plays a crucial role in empowering women and in challenging the unequal power relations between men and women – a trade union movement which forges a movement of women workers.”

(COSATU, the September Commission, 1997)



“How do we critically and strategically question our organisations understanding of patriarchy and commitments to women’s liberation?”

Many of us grapple with the idea of putting feminism on the agenda – in our homes, in our communities, and in our organisations. If we are an activist in an existing social movement or trade union then we may be scared to appear to be “off topic,” or divisive, adding women’s issues to an already existing agenda or criticising sexism within our organisations. And if we are as yet not in any movement fighting for change, then where do we start?

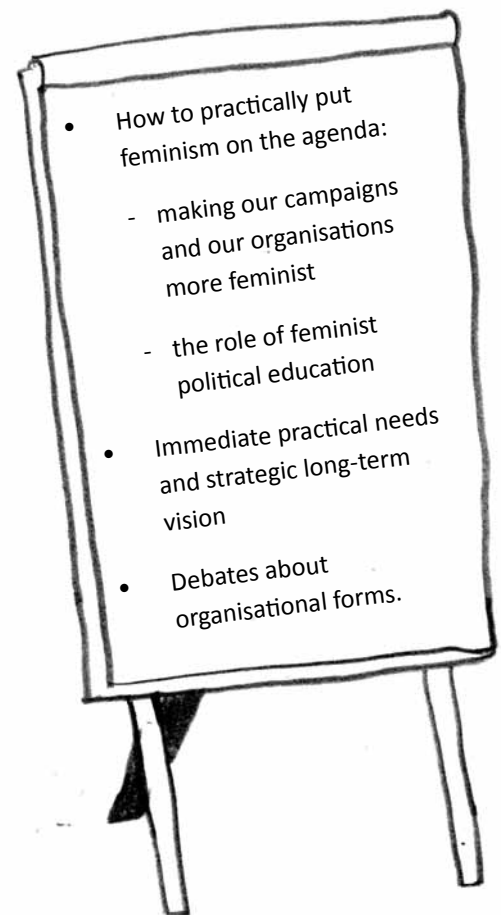
At the beginning of this book we said that there is nothing divisive or unfair about insisting that our organisations take up the struggle against women’s oppression and that we struggle to change male domination within our ranks. In fact we will not be successful in any struggle against neo-liberalism, water cut-offs, evictions and job losses if we refuse to fight against women’s oppression in the same way that we fought against racial divisions. And the struggle against patriarchy is the oldest struggle for human liberation, conducted by the women’s movement over many centuries – so none of us should feel that we are guilty of being divisive if we insist on a feminist agenda in our movements.

One way of starting is to begin to understand that all the issues that we struggle around are gendered – they have different meanings and effects for men and women. Although we may unite around struggling for these rights, sometimes by leaving out the specific ways that women experience oppression we play into the hands of male domination. So a good starting point for creating a feminist agenda in our organisations is by including, specifically,

women’s issues in our demands and campaigns or highlighting women’s specific experience of oppression in the way we campaign or formulate demands.

In this chapter we focus on debates amongst activists as to how to build a feminist consciousness within our organisations and a strong feminist movement that challenges the institutions that uphold women’s oppression.

These issues are not new and many feminists have grappled with different ideas and have gained some experience of different approaches to building a strong feminist movement. We look at:



1. HOW TO PUT FEMINISM ON THE AGENDA

MAKING OUR CAMPAIGNS MORE FEMINIST: TRADE UNION COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT CAMPAIGNS AROUND WOMEN'S ISSUES

Every year our unions negotiate wage increases and working conditions. All unions at least try and ensure that there are mandates from workers in which their demands are clear. Whatever the state of unions, however problematic some of the processes of decision-making may be and however critical we may be about getting proper service from organisers, the one thing which unites and focuses workers is wage negotiations. Because ultimately this is about our livelihoods.

Yet almost never are demands put at wage negotiations which are aimed at doing away with women's oppression, and when they are, they are the first to be negotiated away.

These include issues such as:

- child care and parental rights
- domestic violence
- equal pay
- affirmative action
- toilets and protective clothing
- women's specific medical needs, such as pap smears
- changes at the workplace
- sexual harassment
- laws that discriminate against women.



A CASE STUDY OF THE 2006 SECURITY WORKERS' STRIKE

In 2006, security workers went on strike for a number of demands. The struggle dominated headlines and security workers were attacked by all parliamentary political parties and the media for intimidation and unruliness. Whenever the strike was debated however, the focus was whether their wage demands were reasonable or whether they should be allowed to have centralised bargaining. Yet one of the key demands was the demand for **paid maternity leave** for security workers. After a long struggle some of the demands were met but the employers resisted granting paid maternity leave.

The number of women security guards is increasing, and they comprise about 35% of the sector. Both male and female workers insisted on prolonging the strike over maternity issues because they all felt the effects of the vulnerability of women workers in vulnerable sectors who find their jobs gone when returning to work after having a baby. The strike shows that it is possible for women and men to unite on a women's issue. The union has now recommended a parental leave policy for the security sector that includes the right to child care as well as parental time off.

"Workers were united, saying that without maternity leave there is no agreement. It was the maternity leave issue that broke the strike – it was the last demand, and the last outstanding demand. Both male and female workers said we won't go back to work until we get maternity leave. More men were making a bigger issue than women, females were shy as seen as fighting for their own issue, and males were making a big issue about it."

(Simon Jackson, SATAWU National Coordinator)

2. HOW TO MERGE IMMEDIATE PRACTICAL NEEDS AND STRATEGIC LONG-TERM VISION

Feminism is about challenging sexism on a practical daily level – for example, ensuring that women have bread to eat today. But feminism is also about a long-term goal – that is, changing the systems that mean that we don't have food. So that we don't have to go out and look for bread again tomorrow.



"In organising women we always confront the issue of survival – how can we overcome that?"

(Refugee activist, Cape Town, 2007)

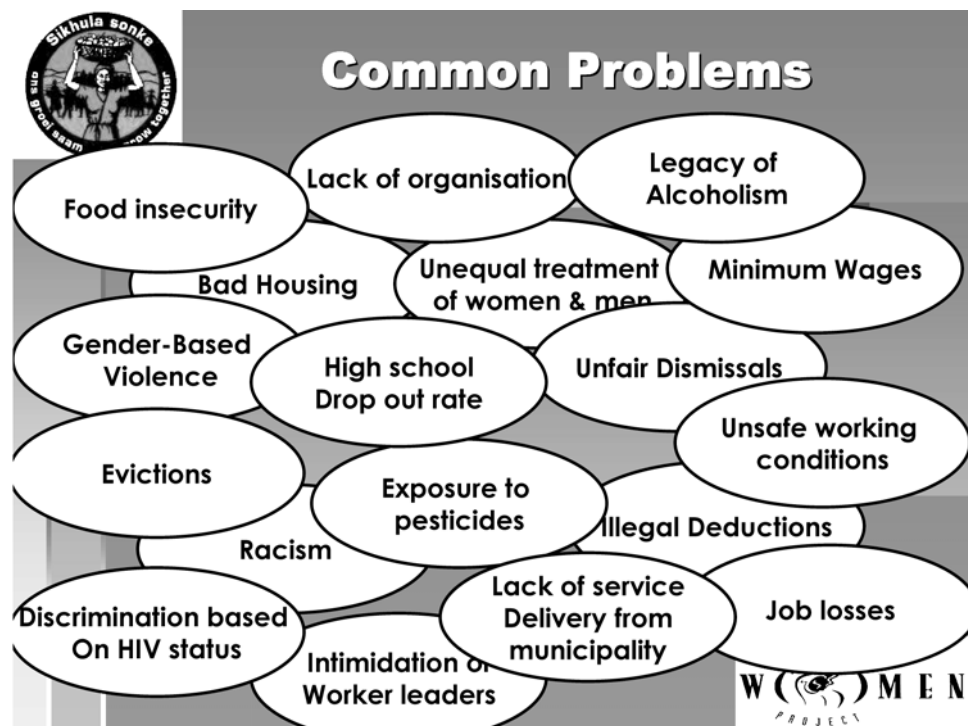
Mary Tal Yuin, Whole World Women's Association

So we need to combine seeing to practical gender needs with retaining our commitment to our long-term goals.

Practical gender interests refer to the immediate concrete needs of women as a result of the sexual division of labour. Addressing these needs is important but may not necessarily lead to a vision of emancipation. For example, meeting the basic needs of children and other family members

and providing food, electricity and water falls on the shoulders of women, but women's movements that focus only on providing these things do not necessarily lead to questioning why women should carry these responsibilities. So there isn't a questioning of women's existing subordination. Also many male activists see these issues as "survivalist" and "women's activities", rather than as political struggles, which are usually reserved for male activities.

Focusing on strategic gender interests means on the other hand, struggling to change the institutions that reproduce poverty, so that we don't wake up tomorrow and go off in search of bread again. Specifically, for women, this means fighting to abolish the sexual division of labour, ending the private/public divide, allowing women the freedom of choice as to whether to have children, and putting in place measures to stop violence against women. Activists have debated how to focus on both the needs of today, and the root cause of our problems as women and have often framed the debate as **reform or revolution?** The debate has often been oversimplified as liberal feminists fighting for reform, and radical feminists fighting for revolution but we need to strategize for both – like many "bread and roses" campaigns that link the two.





3. POWER AND PROCESSES OF OUR STRUCTURES AND MEETINGS

How can we better take into account the patriarchal dynamics of our meetings and structures? In the name of political correctness, we often hear male comrades saying: “can we please hear from the women” when women are not forthcoming in meetings. Our structures continue to exclude women, in such a way as to appear that it is the woman’s fault. She is not confident enough, or bold enough, or clever enough to participate in what are most often male-dominated spaces – regardless of whether the men in the room have consciously decided to create the space that way. Changing these imbalances takes time and attention.

There are some simple things we can change: like the **time and place of meetings** so that we take into account issues like the safety of women travelling at night, and women’s responsibilities at home. At the same time

we should challenge these roles by having **childcare** provided at meetings or having men volunteer to take over household responsibilities like cleaning, cooking, and childcare. Even when childcare is provided, women are often reluctant to take their children out of their routine and bring them to meetings or workshops. There needs to be **codes of conduct** and levels of respect brought into workshops, especially when staying overnight, where women are often sexually harassed. Some organisations have all comrades sign an agreement not to participate in domestic violence in their homes or sexual harassment within the workplace.

More substantial changes to our organisations require commitment to long-term processes whereby both women and men participants assess and negotiate alternative gender and power dynamics of the organisation. Individual men and women can commit to assessing and changing their behaviour – to putting on “gender lenses”, and **assessing the power dynamics** in the room. What would happen if the dominant speakers simply kept quiet or made space for others to set the tone of the

meeting? What about a rotating chair, whereby when one person speaks, then “passes the chair” (i.e. the power) to the next person who indicates that they want a turn. And when that person is finished, they then pass the chair to the next person. Seemingly simple shifts can change the dynamics of a meeting, which are in large part, gendered.

On a collective level, the entire organisation can commit to a **feminist analysis** of the constitution and structure of our organisations. Some guiding questions for such an activity could include:

- How does our organisation understand patriarchy?
- How do we understand how patriarchy plays itself out within our organisation? In what ways does it challenge patriarchy in its structures?
- What guiding principles or methods can we use to constantly challenge gender dynamics inside our organisations, in our campaigns, in our criticisms of the economic and political relations we seek to challenge in society?

After assessing our constitutions, mandates, and policies, we can then collectively assess the gaps between what our movement or union or campaign says about women’s equality,

emancipation, and sexism, and the reality experienced by women?

This booklet has tried to show how sexism and patriarchy is ingrained and not easy to “unlearn”. Like our participation in capitalism, it takes work to understand and then develop an alternative. There is no simple check-list to creating a space free of sexism and declaring our organisations “feminist”. But sexism must be addressed on all levels – and waiting for explicit incidences within an organisation is not healthy or necessary. Often such processes are sparked by sexist incidents and then the negotiation is tense and very much on a women-versus-men basis. This tends to reinforce the stereotype that feminism is anti-male and diverging from the “political” task of our goals of winning housing, or ARVs, or political education. Organisations should address sexism proactively at all levels – before explicit incidences or conflicts arise. And the results of challenging power dynamics can give real alternatives personally and politically to all members, including men.

Since sexism cuts across all issues, organisations can form joint campaigns or activities and information-sharing with others who want to get beyond tokenism or rhetoric and really address the gaps between the talk and the walk of women’s liberation.



4. FEMINIST POLITICAL EDUCATION

In some of our organisations there are policies about building women's leadership. This commitment often contains the idea of "educating" women. This talk assumes that women are not in leadership because they do not know enough. The assumption is that women need to be brought up to speed with male comrades and taught how to understand political economy and how to participate in public political debates. Then, equality will reign. This is the kind of view of liberal feminism, which ignores the structural reasons why men dominate our organisations and, in a sense, blames women for our subordinate status within our movements.

Along with many activists of workers' education in the 1960s, the feminist movement has argued that the methods and goals of education need to be consistent with our objective of ending sexism. Feminist political education begins with the idea that women are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge from above. Growing out of consciousness-raising groups in the 1970s, feminist political education starts from the basis that once women begin to share experiences with one another it becomes clear that our **individual problems** are not our fault or ours to suffer alone – rather they are **political collective problems** to be placed at the centre of our agendas. Sharing our experiences enables us to better pinpoint **who** and **what** is causing us to suffer, and better equips us to fight back collectively.

In the past, consciousness-raising groups addressed the link between how much women do or do not know about their own **bodies**, and **social control**. From reproductive health to self-pleasure, women have been able to learn from one another. These groups drew on theories and methods of **popular** "education of the oppressed". Feminist political education demands that facilitators be responsive. This means having the skill of "reading" the room, the political context, how strongly things are felt and where the group is at in their thinking.

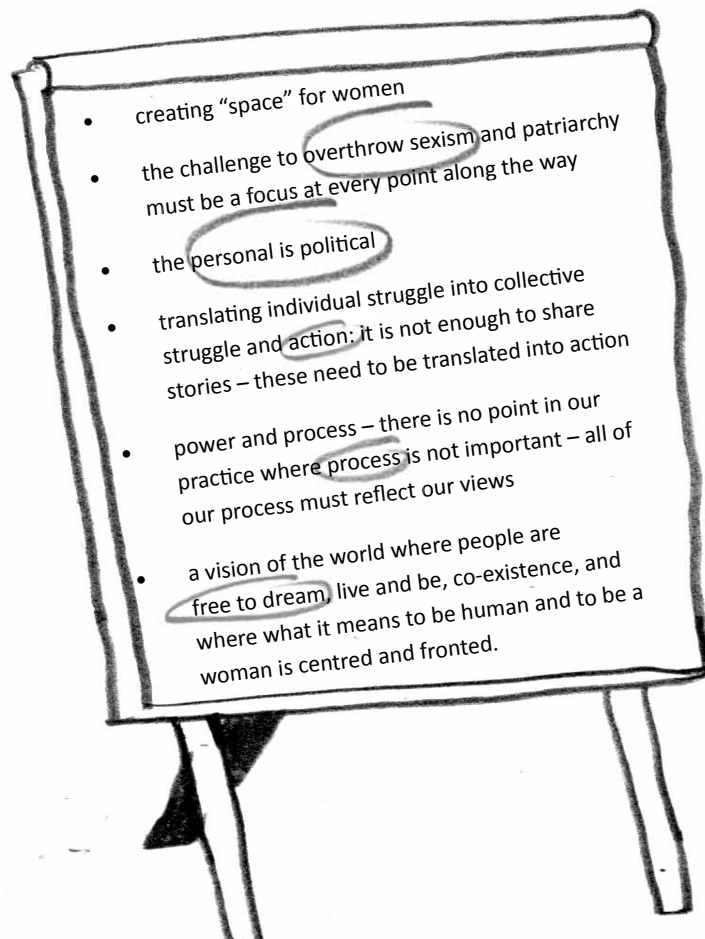
It requires the facilitator to step in and out based on this reading, to hold the thread and move along with the group, making sure the thread isn't pulled so fast that it breaks.

Patriarchy, like capitalism, constantly reinvents itself, so that just when we think we have made progress (like "equality" in the Constitution, or education for girl children, or laws against domestic violence), we find that our "gains" have been mainstreamed or absorbed into the **status quo** – and yet the majority of women continue to suffer. Our education in this way is less about individual skills but more about enabling strategic **collective action** and the implementation of **feminist alternatives**.

"Feminist political education is based on fighting this mainstreaming that is going on."

(TAC activist, Mpumalanga, 2007)

Reading the context, understanding power, doing the work of understanding our oppression, and envisioning change requires ongoing effort, and can be guided by some of the following **principles of feminist political education**:



5. WHAT KINDS OF STRUCTURES WITHIN OUR ORGANISATIONS ARE MOST SUITABLE?

The forms of our organisations can impact on whether we challenge women’s marginalisation or maintain it. Over the years our movements have debated ways to fight sexism within our ranks and have tried various structures to help achieve this goal.

5.1. FORMING WOMEN ONLY ORGANISATIONS

Many activists have formed women’s organisations as vehicles for women’s liberation. Such organisations are clearly defined as having the struggles of women as their focus and as their main activity. In South Africa we have spoken about a long history of such organisations – from the Federation of South African Women, to the ANC Women’s League, to the New Women’s Movement, to the Women’s National Coalition, the Women of Farms, People Opposing Women Abuse and the Whole World Women’s Association of Refugees.

Many people often confine feminism and the women’s movement to the existence or

otherwise of these national or local movements. To be sure we may continue to build such organisations for as long as women are not free.

But a strong women’s movement needs to change power relations within our society so fundamentally that it also needs to be composed of all other organisations fighting oppression – of the working class, of oppressed people,

of nationalities. This not only means that women’s organisations need to work together with trade unions, social movements and local and international campaigns. It also means that activists in all these movements need themselves to be struggling to make their organisations feminist.

This raises the question of what kind of structures within our mixed gender organisations can help to make them feminist.

5.2 FORMING WOMEN’S STRUCTURES WITHIN OUR ORGANISATIONS

The experience of high levels of sexism within organisations of the working class has left many feeling that the only solution is to set up women-only sub structures. These have taken a range of forms – from women’s committees or to women’s caucuses.

Pro: can have the conversations that are not possible in a mixed gender environment where sexism silences women.



Con: women’s issues can become “ghettoized” in the sense that people tend to think that these issues need not be taken up by our organisations as priorities because “they are issues for the women’s committees”.

5.3 FORMING GENDER COMMITTEES

Amongst organisations in the past some activists have argued that separate women’s committees are divisive and that challenging gender power relations is of necessity a task that women and men must undertake together. They have therefore argued that instead of women’s committees we should set up gender committees which can involve men and women.

Pro: gender committees that also involve men can mean that men also take up feminist issues.

Con: gender committees can themselves become dominated by male gender activists and so defeat the purpose of fighting sexism within our organisations.

 Women’s Committees	
<p>Pro:</p> <p>Open conversation</p>	<p>Con:</p> <p>Issues become “ghettoized”</p>
 Gender Committees	
<p>Pro:</p> <p>Men included to also take up feminist issues</p>	<p>Con:</p> <p>Can become dominated by men</p>

THE SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPAL WORKERS UNION (SAMWU) STARTED WITH WOMEN'S COMMITTEES.

There were constitutional structures at all levels – branch women's committees, provincial women's committees and national women's committees with office bearers. The representatives attended all union structures with full **speaking rights** but **no voting rights**. Their main tasks were seen as **empowering** women, raising women's issues in meetings and building campaigns around women's issues.

But this resulted in the **ghettoisation** of women's issues. For example, when an issue like maternity rights was brought up, the response was: "Oh the women's committees will deal with that" instead of maternity rights becoming an integral part of what the union was fighting for.

In this way, women's committees became the ends in themselves, rather than the means to an end. It became more important to have the women's committees' meeting and functioning than to worry about what they were dealing with, or how they interacted with the rest of the union. They didn't have a clear programme of action.

In fact, they served to **stifle women's voices**, rather than promote them. The PEC had representatives from the women's committee sitting on it. So everyone sat back and relaxed because there were now women sitting in the PEC – and branches didn't have to worry too much to bring women as part of their formal, constitutional delegation. The result of this was that the majority of women in the PEC were there with a PWC hat, and had no real voting rights.

After this experience SAMWU set up gender committees in which both women and men could participate. But gender committees today in SAMWU are struggling. There are various reasons, but one of the main reasons is because they don't have a clear programme of action and many don't really understand what they are supposed to do.

Their National Education Officer concluded that:

"Women's committees were good for everyone except the women"

THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMERCIAL, CATERING AND ALLIED WORKERS' UNION (SACCAWU)

SACCAWU also decided to shift from women's committees to gender forums. Their National Gender Coordinator described this experience: "But we still had the belief that if you have structures that meet often then you are dealing with the problems. So we set up a national gender forum – but we were not sure what it was going to do – we just knew that we needed one. We didn't first discuss how best we could get an exciting, vibrant women's movement and then asked what kind of co-ordination we need. The first thing we did was to establish a gender forum and the first task of the gender forum was to ensure that each region and local had a gender forum. And then we said gender structures are not functioning. We must work harder."

5.4. CREATING FORUMS OF WOMEN ACTIVISTS ACROSS DIFFERENT ORGANISATIONS

Creating a forum that brings together women activists from different organisations is another way of building women’s leadership and activism. Such a forum can allow women activists the opportunity to compare their experiences in their different organisations. Women activists can in this way share and learn from one another how best to build a feminist consciousness within their organisations and support one another when sexism rears its ugly head. Such a forum – which does not necessarily take on the form of an organisation – can at times be an ideal environment for learning and building confidence while not having to wait for mandates and be encumbered by running organisational structures. An example of this in Cape Town is called Building Women’s Activism.

Building Women’s Activism brings together women who are involved in struggle in mostly mixed male and female organisations. It exists because women feel marginalised within their movements but it does not try to replace the organisations. Instead it provides a space for women to learn, share, enjoy, network and articulate their views in a safe, supporting space. In this way, they can challenge the sexism they face and the patriarchal nature of their organisations.

Building Women’s Activism public forums are held monthly as a women-only space for activists in the labour and social movements.

These emerged in the context of the contradictions of the female-dominated social movements with male-dominated leadership and as a result of specific incidences of sexism within working-class movements. The space has three main parts – activism and

networking, education and outreach – and draws local women from across grassroots movements struggling against privatisation, farm exploitation, AIDS, housing, water cut offs, public health, and so on. The focus is decided upon by the women in the room and the forum has looked at sexism within social movements, the link between capitalism and patriarchy, reproductive rights, and solidarity with women in Zimbabwe and Palestine. Over time there has been a powerful shift from sharing to action, and the process will continue to unfold.

“We wanted a safe space as women, to share experiences and strategies and action.”


(Bridgette Magqaza, Khayelitsha youth activist)



The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) has also felt the need to create women-only spaces through a women’s leadership course, with the aim of women using women-only spaces to strengthen their role within a mixed gender organisation. As one TAC activist comments: “Participating in all-women spaces has opened up and created the space to talk about things. I spend my whole life worrying it is only happened to me. We didn’t know we had been raped or experienced abuse at home. It gave me power to go back and talk to other women.”

Pro: such a forum can give women space to speak to each other and ask questions and work through ideas in a supportive pro-woman space; be a break from aggressive dynamics and strength to challenge sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and male dominated leadership in the movements, and to challenge sexism and provide leadership in the movement at large.

Con: the forum does not answer the question of when do we engage the men, or the common enemy, or how do we create feminist men? Also the forum is not an organisation so it can’t be accountable and can’t present any mandates.

 Forums	
Pro: Support A break from sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, male domination	Con: Does not engage men or turn them into feminist men

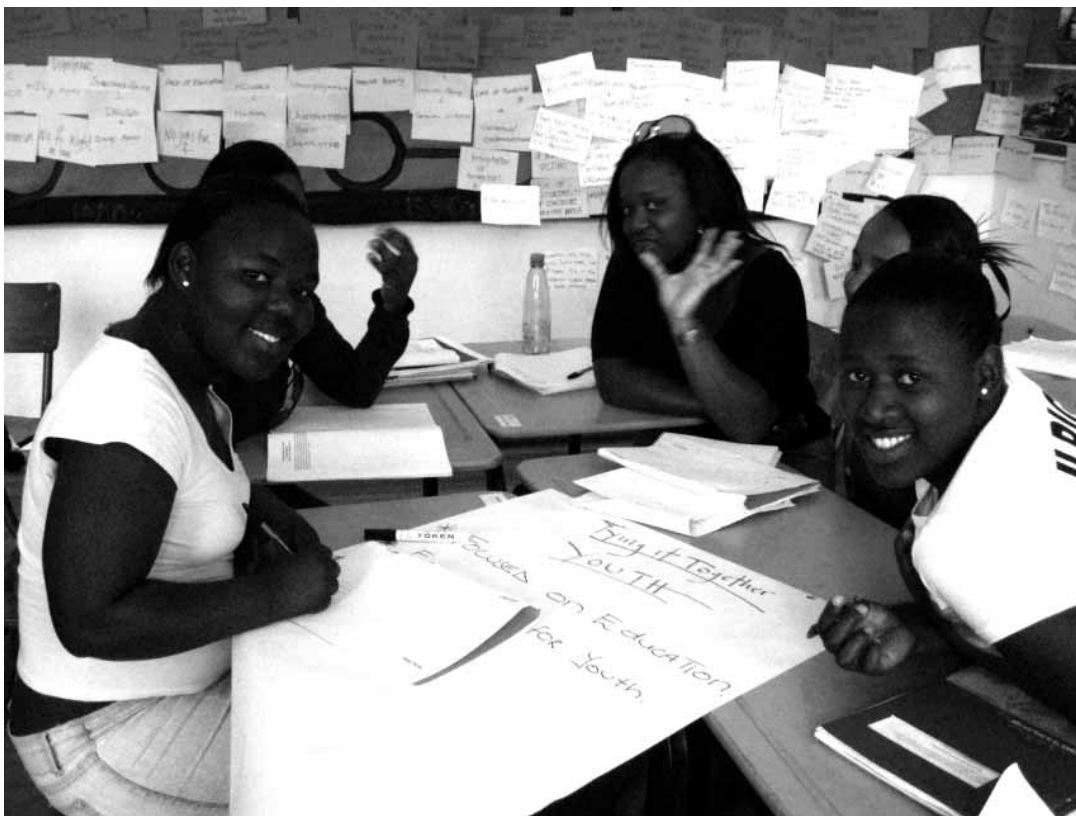
CONCLUSION:

Feminism must form a necessary part of movements to strengthen our struggles against all forms of oppression. The focus here has been on how movements take up issues affecting women as a social group as well as the power relations between women and men. There is no easy answer, no recipe to follow – the ongoing confrontation of sexism and women’s oppression requires a constant re-negotiation of priorities and “reading” of the context. In part this is because any change, however small, means that the intervention might not last forever. However the backlash that comes as a result of challenging the status quo should not be underestimated – especially when one is thinking about violence against women.

“In order to solve things we have to start where we are, liberate ourselves to liberate one another.”

(Building Women’s Activism Participant, 2007)

Revolutionary struggle needs to be created in which both reforms to the current system and transformation are based on grassroots struggles. Trade unions and social movements need to recognise the value and the necessity of liberation for women as critical for the broader revolutionary project.



EXCERPTS FROM a Solidarity Statement For Our Sisters In Zimbabwe

MARCH 2007

This collective statement comes from meetings of grassroots women activists from across Cape Town who see no distinction between domestic and state violence, or between Zimbabwe and South Africa when it comes to responding to the attack on our sisters.

We write this statement to acknowledge and listen to the pain of Zimbabwean women and to support their quest to become full citizens which we in South Africa are also fighting for. We recognise that in the context of poverty, displacement, violence, and exclusion, state oppression adds another unbearable layer to women's oppression which we are determined to fight together.

Silenced by the state...

This month, the Zimbabwean state decided to celebrate International Women's Day by passing the long-contested Domestic Violence Bill. This is no doubt a long awaited for and important piece of legislation to protect women from violence, but it loses its value when it is set against the context of repression of activism/dissent and violence perpetrated against women by the Zimbabwean state.

Women's access to justice...

We in South Africa know too well the gap between the hard earned theories set out in law, and the reality of women's access to justice in practice.

Long-standing Zimbabwean activists for women's rights, Sekai Holland and Grace Kwinjeh, were brutally beaten by the police and refused right of passage when they tried to come to Johannesburg for medical care. These are not isolated incidents, activists from Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) and women involved in the labour movement have likewise been targeted. Along with their daughters they have been rounded up in the night, blindfolded and taken to unknown destinations in the bush where they are interrogated and assaulted with weapons and fists. They have had bones fractured, earlobes torn, and medical treatment denied.

Women's bodies as a boxing ring...

Many of these women have dedicated their lives to confronting racism, sexism, colonialism and patriarchy and have been feminist activists for much longer than they have been opposition members. They have paved our way and we stand behind them wholeheartedly. Whilst male activists are also subjected to brutal attacks – the violent victimisation of everyday women through demolition of houses and businesses in Operation Murambatsvina, and as political and feminist activists has a specific dynamic where women are hardest hit,



and attacked on multiple levels at once. During the assault, Sekai and Grace were accused as being “whores of Tsvangirai (MDC leader) and prostitutes of Bush and Blair”.

Competition amongst elite male politicians in Mugabe’s inner circle are being played out on the bodies of women on the ground. These attacks on women activists are not simply a Zanu-PF/MDC issue. When the bill was debated in Parliament towards the end of 2006, a member of the opposition party (MDC) fought against it, arguing that criminalising wife battery was “dangerous for men and our powers will be usurped, men’s rights will be gone if this bill is passed”.

Violence by any name...

1 in 4 women in Zimbabwe face violence in the home and forced sex with their partners. In South Africa, 1 in 4 first experience of sex is forced.

Despite the existence of laws which are supposed to protect us the majority women in SA, like in Zimbabwe, fail to access justice.

Demolishing women’s security...

Across Southern Africa, people’s livelihoods and ability to support their family are being violently demolished. In Zimbabwe it was Murambatsvina, in Zambia this week thousands of informal traders are being cleared out of the city centres and in Cape Town there is a proposal for the creation of a new special police force set up to demolish “illegal” structures. In all cases, poor women are at the front lines and we know women bear the brunt of these operations clean-ups.

Women’s solidarity...

We demand that both the state in Zimbabwe and South Africa must stop using women’s bodies as political footballs to gain mileage by passing the bills without women being able to access justice. We must put pressure on our government – silent diplomacy is killing Zimbabwean women. We encourage all South Africans to take a stand against the human rights abuses in Zimbabwe – in general and in particular against our fellow women activists.

WOMEN’S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS!!

For us, solidarity is to become one, so we will mobilise and set up networks between SA and Zimbabwe. We want political peace and the machines of violence, be they public or private, to stop brutalising women. We recognise the national boundary between us and Zimbabwe as a colonial creation and just as we were welcomed into Zimbabwe during our struggle, we welcome Zimbabweans fighting for a free Zimbabwe into South Africa. We want to create one movement for all women in both SA and Zimbabwe to fight for women’s rights. We stand by our sisters in Zimbabwe for a consolidated resistance!!

Building women’s activism (BWA) is monthly women-only space which brings together women activists from in and around Cape Town to share, support, network and learn. This statement was produced at a public forum to talk about State Violence and Women in Zimbabwe – activists from the following organisations were there: the Anti-war Coalition, Treatment Action Campaign, New Women’s Movement, Centre for Civil Society, Whole World Women’s Association, Community Networking Forum, Sikhula Sonke, Litha Park Anti-Eviction Campaign, Umzabalazo we Jubilee, Free Association, AIDC Right to Work Campaign, South African Domestic Service and Allied Worker’s Union, COSATU, Women’s Hope Education and Training Trust, Social Movement’s Indaba Western Cape, Hanover Park Wellness Clinic, Khulumani Support Group, Overcome Heights Women’s Action Group, Street People Sector, Mosaic and the International Labour Research and Information Group.

EXCERPTS FROM the Charter of Feminist Principles for African feminists

Naming Ourselves As Feminists

We define and name ourselves publicly as Feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognize that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves Feminist places us in a clear ideological position.

By naming ourselves as Feminists we politicise the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action.

We have multiple and varied identities as African Feminists. We are African women – we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with "Ifs", "Buts" or "Howevers". We are Feminists. Full stop.

Our understanding of feminism and patriarchy

As African feminists our understanding of feminism places patriarchal social relations structures and systems which are embedded in other oppressive and exploitative structures at the centre of our analysis. Patriarchy is a system of male authority which legitimizes the oppression of women through political, social, economic, legal cultural, religious and military institutions. Men's access to, and control over resources and rewards within the private and public sphere derives its legitimacy from the patriarchal ideology of male dominance. Patriarchy varies in time and space, meaning that it changes over time, and varies according to class, race, ethnic, religious and global-imperial relationships and structures.

Furthermore, in the current conjunctures, patriarchy does not simply change according to these factors, but is inter-related with and informs relationships of class, race, ethnic, religious, and global-imperialism. Thus to challenge patriarchy effectively also requires challenging other systems of oppression and exploitation, which frequently mutually support each other.

Our understanding of patriarchy is crucial because it provides for us as feminists, a framework within which to express the totality of oppressive and exploitative relations which affect African women. Patriarchal ideology enables and legitimizes the structuring of every aspect of our lives by establishing the framework within which society defines and views men and women and constructs male supremacy. Our ideological task as feminists is to understand this system and our political task is to end it. Our focus is fighting against patriarchy as a system rather than fighting individual men or women.

Therefore, as feminists, we define our work as investing individual and institutional energies in the struggle against all forms of patriarchal oppression and exploitation.

Our Identity As African Feminists

As Feminists who come from/work/live in Africa, we claim the right and the space to be Feminist and African. We recognize that we do not have a homogenous identity as feminists – we acknowledge and celebrate our diversities and our shared commitment to a transformatory agenda for African societies and African women in particular. This is what gives us our common feminist identity.

Our current struggles as African Feminists are inextricably linked to our past as a continent – diverse pre-colonial contexts, slavery, colonization, liberation struggles, neo-colonialism, globalization, etc. Modern African States were built off the backs of African Feminists who fought alongside men for the liberation of the continent. As we craft new African States in this new millennium, we also craft new identities for African women, identities as full citizens, free from patriarchal oppression, with rights of access, ownership and control over resources and our own bodies and utilizing positive aspects of our cultures in liberating and nurturing ways.

We also recognize that our pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial histories and herstories require special measures to be taken in favour of particular African women in different contexts.

We acknowledge the historical and significant gains that have been made by the African Women's Movement over the past forty years, and we make bold to lay claim to these gains as African feminists – they happened because African Feminists led the way, from the grassroots level and up; they strategized, organized, networked, went on strike and marched in protest, and did the research, analysis, lobbying, institution building and all that it took for States, employers and institutions to acknowledge women's personhood.

As African feminists, we are also part of a global feminist movement against patriarchal oppression in all its manifestations. Our experiences are linked to that of women in other parts of the world with whom we have shared solidarity and support over the years. As we assert our space as African feminists, we also draw inspiration from our feminist ancestors who blazed the trail and made it possible to affirm the rights of African women. As we invoke the memory of those women whose names are hardly ever recorded in any history books, we insist that it is a profound insult to claim that feminism was imported into Africa from the West.

We reclaim and assert the long and rich tradition of African women's resistance to patriarchy in Africa. We henceforth claim the right to theorize for ourselves, write for ourselves, strategise for ourselves and speak for ourselves as African feminists.



EXCERPTS FROM COSATU: September Commission, 1997

Under apartheid black women workers suffered more than any other group; as black people, as workers without rights, and as women. Historically, organising in South Africa was almost entirely focused around male workers and their needs and interests. Most trade unions in South Africa have elected men to positions of leadership and have failed to address the specific concerns of women workers.

We have a vision of a future where women participate equally in the labour market and the world of work without having to face gender barriers or glass ceilings. The trade union movement has a crucial role to play in fighting for justice for women in the workplace, the labour market and society as a whole.

We have a vision of economic policies that include women's emancipation. We have a vision of eradicating apartheid oppression and gender oppression in all spheres of society and in the workplace in line with our new constitution.

We have a vision of the trade union movement as a home for women workers, a movement which they know will fight for justice for women in the workplace and the economy. This will forge a movement for gender equality in the labour market, and must be seen as an integral part of our vision of a strong COSATU, politically and economically.

None of this can be achieved without taking into account the unequal division of labour in the household and ensuring that COSATU fights for socially provided childcare facilities and equal participation in household labour. We have a vision of a trade union movement that plays a crucial role in empowering women and in challenging the unequal power relations between men and women – a trade union movement which forges a movement of women workers.



EXCERPTS FROM Sikhula Sonke

Membership Application

I hereby apply for membership to Sikhula Sonke. I understand what Sikhula Sonke stands for. I respect the principals of the Constitution of the organisation. I support the policies and principals of Sikhula Sonke.

Name/Address/Phone _____ Sex: M/F I live on a farm _____ I work on a farm _____

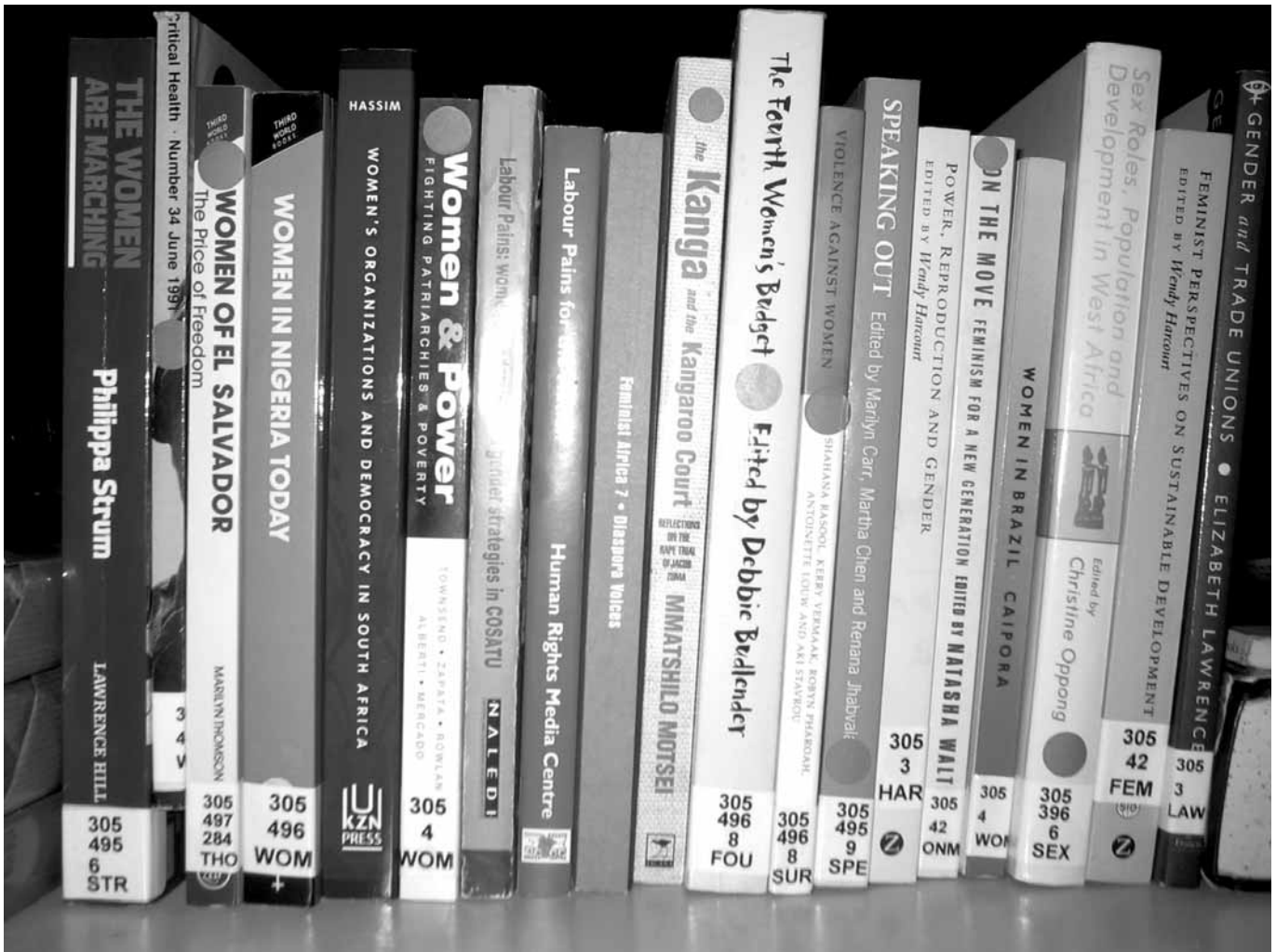
As a member I want to be part of:

Women's leadership and development	
To organise and recruit workers from other farms	
To investigate and improve housing situations	
To support child and youth programmes	
Attend meetings to build my organisation	
To know and practice my rights	
To serve the elderly	
To investigate and improve working conditions	
To mobilise and recruit seasonal workers	

As a male member I undertake to always refrain from the use of violence. I am aware that my membership could be terminated if I am found guilty of violence.

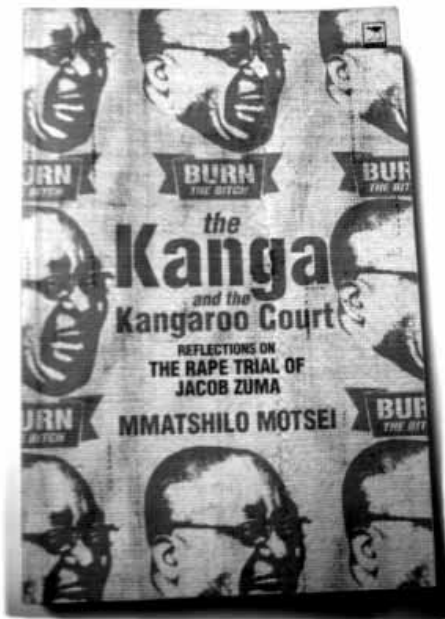
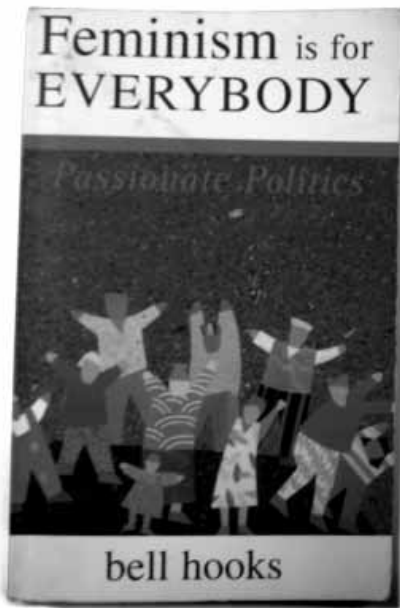
Signature

APPENDIX

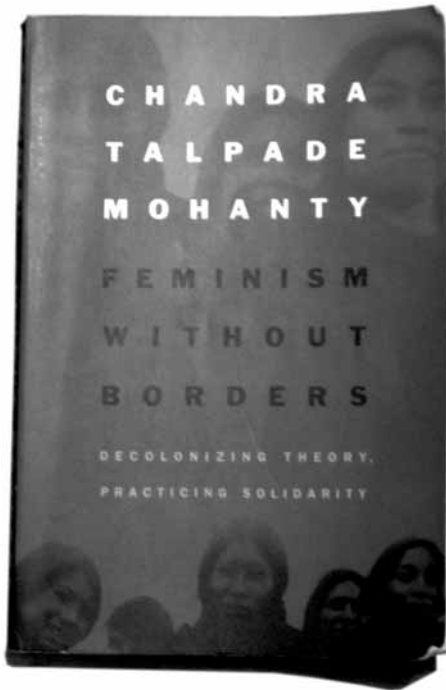


READING ON FEMINISM:

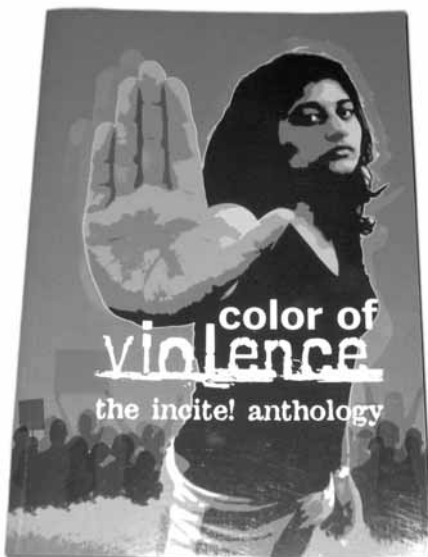
- Agenda, A Journal of Feminist Debate
- Alex De Waal. AIDS and Power
- Angela Davis: Women, Race, and Class
- Amrita Basu (ed): The Challenge of Local Feminisms, Women's Movements in Global Perspective
- Audre Lorde's poetry and book: Sister Outsider
- Barbara Ehrenreich and Hochschild: Global Woman – Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy
- bell hooks: Feminism is for Everybody
- Chandra Mohanty, Russo, Torres (eds): Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism
- Chandra Talpade Mohanty: Feminism Without Borders – Decolonising Theory, Practicing Solidarity
- Cheryl Walker: Women and Resistance in South Africa



- Elaine Salo: "Complicating Feminist Analysis of South African Women's Movements"
- Elizabeth Schmidt: Peasants Traders and Wives, Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe
- Feminist Political Education Project: In My Own Words- Zimbabwean Women's Encounters with Operation Murambatsvina
- Gloria Anzaldua and Cherríe Moraga: This Bridge Called My Back – Writings by Radical Women of Colour
- Human Rights Media Centre: Labour Pains for the Nation: Eight Women Workers Share Their Stories
- ILRIG SACCAWU: Workers are Parents Too – A Workers' Guide to Parental Rights
- ILRIG: Gender and Globalisation
- INCITE: The Color of Violence
- Jacklyn Cock: "Colonels and Cadres: The Relationship Between Feminism and Militarism in South Africa"
- Jurgen Schadeberg: Voices from the Land – Farm Life and Farm Conditions in South Africa
- Leigh Brownhill & Terisa Turner: "Feminism in the Mau Mau Resurgence"
- Marilyn Waring: If Women Counted
- Mmatshilo Motsei: The Kanga and the Kangaroo Court, Reflections on the Rape Trial of Jacob Zuma
- Molar Ogundipe-Leslie: "Stiwanism: Feminism in an African Context"
- NACLA Report on the Americas April 2007: Latin American Feminists and the Left
- NALEDI: Labour Pains – Women's Leadership and Gender Strategies in COSATU
- Nancy Whittier: Feminist Generations – the Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement
- Nkuzi Development Association: Still Searching for Security, the Reality of Farm Dweller Evictions in South Africa
- Nomboniso Gasa (eds): Women in South African History
- Our Bodies Ourselves
- Patricia Hill Collins: Black Feminist Thought
- Sally Roesch Wagner: Feminist Politics Activism and Vision: Local and Global Challenges



- Sheila Rowbotham: Hidden from History – 300 Years of Women’s Oppression and the Fight Against It
- Shirley Walters and Linzi Manicom: Gender in Popular Education – Methods for Empowerment
- Shereen Essof: Zimbabwean Women in Movement; She-murengas, “Reflections on the Women’s movement”
- Shireen Hassim: Women’s Organisations and Democracy in South Africa – Contesting Authority
- Shulamith Firestone: The Dialectic of Sex – A Case for Feminist Revolution.
- Simone de Beauvoir: The Second Sex
- Sonia Alvarez: Latin American Feminisms ‘Go Global’: Trends of the 1990s and Challenges
- Susan Alice Watkins, Rueda and Rodriguez: Feminism for Beginners
- Susan Faludi: Backlash, the Undeclared War Against American Women
- Suzanne Pharr: Homophobia- A Weapon of Sexism
- Terisa Turner, Wahu M. Kaara, Leigh Brownhill: “Social Reconstruction in Rural Africa: A Gendered Class Analysis of Women’s Resistance to Cash Crop Production in Kenya”
- Vijay Prashad and Teo Balve: Dispatches From Latin America: on the Frontlines of Neoliberalism



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