Towards a Women's Movement

Gertrude Fester

Summary

The paper, presented by a black woman activist, attempts to illustrate the demands made on women activists' lives and problems encountered in dealing with academics her experience of which is limited to the Western Cape.

She points out that there is an activism/academy gap and sets about defining both concepts, emphasising the possibility of subjective interpretation.

She views with displeasure academic members of women's organisations who do not offer their skills, or who write articles without revealing their membership. She questions the validity of their membership and their inability to appreciate problems facing activists who have to meet deadlines. She refers to unbased assumptions made by academics who attempt interpreting black women's experiences and refers to the anomalous situation where the "oppressed nation" has to depend on the knowledge proferred by members of the oppressor nation. She pleads for better facilities equipping black women to write about themselves. She comments on the fact that academics fail to return their drafts to activists and complains that women telling their stories, are not given due recognition.

She maintains that conferences do not succeed in bridging the gap between theory and practice, and stresses that feminism should be addressed as feminism peculiar to women of South Africa. She cautions that activism and academy should not be polarised and suggests regular assessment and evaluation of political organisations.

She stresses that activism could benefit from sound theoretical analysis and pleads for exchanging strategies and resources which will not only facilitate work but obviate duplication.

Opsomming

Die referaat, deur 'n swart vroue aktivis aangebied, strewe daarna om die eise wat aan vroue aktiviste gestel word, toe te lig. Daar word ook verwys na probleme wat ervaar word in onderhandeling met akademici. Die aanbiedster het aangedui dat haar ervaring tot die Wes Kaap beperk is.

Sy toon aan dat daar 'n aktivis/akademikus gaping bestaan en definieer albei konsepte, terwyl sy op die moontlikheid van subjektiewe vertolking wys.

Sy dui haar misnoeë aan teenoor akademiese lede van vroue organisasies wat nie hulle vaardighede beskikbaar stel nie, of wat artikels skryf, maar hulle lidmaatskap verswyg. Sy bevraagteken die geldigheid van hulle lidmaatskap asook hulle onvermoë om die probleme te begryp van aktiviste wat hulle by 'n datum moet hou. Sy verwys na ongegronde aannames deur akademici wat poog om die ervarings van swart vroue te vertolk en die anomalie waar die "onderdrukte nasie" hulle moet verlaat op die kennis deur die onderdrukkende nasie, aangebied. Sy bepleit beter fasiliteite wat swart vrouens sal toerus om self oor hulle eie ervarings te berig. Sy noem die feit dat akademici in gebreke bly om hulle konsepte aan aktiviste terug te stuur en dat hulle nalaat om vroue wie se verhale hulle gebruik, verdiende erkenning te gee.

Sy beweer dat konferensies nie daarin slaag om die gaping tussen teorie en praktyk te oorbrug nie en benadruk dat feminisme aangespreek moet word as feminisme eie aan die vroue van Suid-Afrika. Sy waarsku daarteen dat aktivisme en akademie nie gepolariseer moet word nie en en stel voor dat daar gereelde evaluering van politieke organisasies behoort te wees.

Sy beklemtoon dat aktivisme kan baat by gesonde teoretiese ontleding en bepleit die uitruil van strategieë en hulpbronne wat nie alleen die werk sal bevorder nie, maar wat duplisering sal uitskakel.

This paper is an attempt by a black[1] woman activist[2] with some academic training to address the above question. This does not mean that in my

claiming activist status, I am either anti-academic or trying to justify the fact that this paper may not fulfil the demands of academia. I will try to illustrate the demands on women activists' lives and the everyday experiences and problems that we have had with academics. I want to emphasise, however, that as activists we have not only had negative experiences. Working hand in hand with academics has enhanced our contribution to the struggle for liberation of women and, may I be so bold as to say, that the academics' analytical tools have been sharpened. Because South Africa differs so vastly from region to region and my experience is limited largely to the Western Cape, what I say here refers to that region.

Secondly I would like to point out the methodology of compiling this paper. One of the weaknesses of academics is that many of them (and I'm specifically referring to South African women academics) write about women without interviewing them, using no primary data whatsoever. Of course one understands that there are often limitations of time, money etcetera. Yet many are so entrenched in their written culture, or maybe collecting data is too time-consuming. They therefore do not see the need to verify their readings about certain women even when those women live in the same city. I intend to use this paper as a sort of historic corrective and will therefore make extensive use of women's speeches and organisational pamphlets and documentation.

In South Africa, which is notorious for its apartheid/segregationist policies, the fragmentation of its society is starkly reflected in its women's movements. I want to emphasise the plural because there is no way that we can speak of a women's movement. In fact there may even be some critics who would argue that there are no women's movements as the latter are not feminist enough. I will comment on this and elaborate on the concept of feminism later. The activism/academy dichotomy which is the focus of this conference is less harshly experienced by the majority of South African women because of the other major contradictions in their lives.

It is common knowledge and it has been well-documented[3] that women do not form a homogeneous group. Apartheid and its concomitant exploitation and oppression of black people in general and of African women in particular have aggravated the divisions amongst women and the conditions of African working-class and rural women.[4]

Ethnicity was reinforced and/or revived through the bantustan policies. Cultural practices which may have over the years disappeared, were recreated. The apartheid ideology had a profound effect on race and ethnic consciousness.

Apartheid also impacted upon what was acknowledged as the main site of struggle. Because national oppression was so severe and black men and women were oppressed, women and men were allies against the oppressors. The debate between whether women's liberation was contradictory or complementary to national liberation, has still not been resolved for many. In fact, because of the crises in this period of negotiations many women's organisations vacillated between different programmes of action. This, I think, is an unconscious aligning with "national" issues. It is not that

"women's" issues are subordinated, but more time is spent on responding to national mandates and activities. Women's organisations are less consistently proactive with regard to women's issues.

Not only is this ambivalence experienced at an organisational level but also at a personal level. At a workshop held at CACE (Centre for Continuing Adult Education) at the University of Western Cape in October 1990, participants were asked to reflect on oppressive gender experiences. This was done in small groups. When a white woman described her fear and anguish on being robbed by a man, black women immediately asked whether the man was black. The black women promptly attempted through race and class analysis to justify this action. It was also conceded that race loyalty/consciousness was stronger than gender and class consciousness.

Other divisions comprise religious groups, lesbians, the disabled, radical feminists and language groups. What I found interesting in Hansson (1991) was that she used South African race divisions for black women, but she divided white women into official language groups, exactly what the South African government had done with its divide and rule policy: all blacks were divided into ethnic groups whereas white divisions were minimised despite large numbers of immigrants speaking Greek, Portuguese, German, etcetera.

Because of the central role the liberation struggle plays in the lives of the majority of women, women are divided according to liberation ideologies. It was surprising that women academics never mentioned this very important and often insurmountable division. As an ANC WL[5] activist my experience is that this division permeates everything. With the launch of the National Women's Coalition this division has been temporarily overcome. How successful this liaison is to be will eventually be proved by history. I will elaborate on the National Coalition later.

In order to analyse the activism/academy gap it is important to attempt to conceptualise what we mean by these terms, as it was made clear to me when I interviewed women, that very many of them had different interpretations of the word. According to the Twentieth Century Chambers Dictionary, activism refers to

> a philosophy of creative will, especially practical idealism of Rudolf Eucken; a policy of vigorous action

and an activist is

> a believer in the philosophy of activism; one who supports a policy of vigorous action; one who plays a special part in advancing a project or in strengthening the hold of political ideas.

Academy refers to

> Plato's school of philosophy; a higher, would-be higher, or specialised school or university; a society for the promotion of arts and science; purely theoretical arguments.

Many women interviewed, saw themselves as combining the above two extremes. Comrade Ray Alexander, prolific writer, ANC and SACP mem-

ber, definitely saw herself as an activist, although to the average activist she was seen as an academic. A social anthropologist saw herself as combining the two. She has been a campaigner for improved working conditions for all women staff, attempting to get away from the academic, administrative and maintenance divide. Many activists think that only mainstream political activists can be called activists.

I feel it is imperative that I raise some of the problems and demands of being an activist at this, I suspect, largely academic gathering. I am also wondering, because of the focus of the conference, to what extent the organisers have attempted to ensure that the voice of activists will be heard here and to what extent they have been successful. As a woman activist for more than a decade in a period of extreme state repression, violence and intense mass action there was no way that even the most realistic programme of action could be adhered to. Activities that had to be sacrificed because of responses to crises included education and training programmes and a task we've always realised the urgency of and yet never succeeded in, is the documentation of our struggle. Very seldom could we be pro-active; our activities were largely reactive. During this period the police had Draconian powers. Political meetings were prohibited and thousands of people, men, women and even children as young as nine were detained.

Let me outline other problems. From early 1984 to 1990, and it is still continuing to a lesser extent, many of our members were "on the run"; that means not living at the same place for more than a few days. You disguised yourself so that you would not be recognised and therefore arrested. We always said that there was too much work outside and that we could not afford the luxury of prison. We never used telephones to arrange meetings. If we used the telephone it had to be in code. Often there were communication problems when a code was not deciphered correctly. Those of us who had access to cars would change them regularly, swopping with friends. When moving from place to place you always had to check whether you were being followed. If yes, you had to outmanoeuvre your followers. Certain persons had the task of finding "safe" houses and cars. Venues for work or meetings were never known beforehand. We had to meet at a designated place, wait for everyone to arrive, without communicating, of course, and leave for the venue after ten minutes. All of this was not negative. We benefitted from the state of emergency in that we had to be punctual otherwise we'd miss the checkpoint. There are many other examples that I could outline.

But I need to emphasise that we were not only victims of police intimidation and unlimited power. We have many stories to tell about how we, as groups of women or alone, intimidated and defied the police, how when fifteen of us were arrested for being in an African township without a permit, we made so much noise at the police station, irritated them with our questions and our demands of what our rights were that they released us after a few hours "on bail", which we still have not paid.

Our women's organisation was racially mixed and multi-class, but we ensured that the issues taken up were the issues of the most oppressed women; housing, passes, cost of living, troops out of the township.[6]

Other demands on our time are requests for speakers and input. Because of various factors we have not succeeded in empowering as many women as we should have. I have mentioned the serious limitations of time; education and training, as important as they are, often had to be sacrificed. Our meetings are often long as it is imperative that we use translations. To encourage broad participation, members are encouraged to speak in the language that they are confident to speak in, so in our region English, Xhosa and Afrikaans are spoken. Meetings are often lengthened by repeated explanations which we do not find problematic as we feel it is important for members to understand the issues discussed. It is because of these practices that many women, who were shy and without confidence initially, now participate actively. Many women leaders on being interviewed about their political growth, admitted that their training ground was in the women's organisations.[7]

Communication is also a great difficulty. In a technocratic era when telephones and cars are taken for granted, we as women's organisations do not have those luxuries as the majority of our members live in rural and squatter areas. Loud-hailers are used to announce meetings. A whispering chain is used for sensitive areas.

We must acknowledge that many activists are obsessed with meetings and confuse "vigorous action" with intellectual debate and discussions. Action is sometimes delayed by mandates, democracy and bureaucracy. It is imperative that a pragmatic and creative balance between accountability and initiative and action be found.

It is also interesting that even though some of our members are academics (teaching at universities), very few have ever made their skills available to the organisation. In fact, some of them wrote articles about the organisation without any consultation. I do not mean that they needed "permission" from the organisation, but in their articles they made no reference to the fact that they were members. I find that behaviour schizophrenic; as members they give input to the organisations' activity and policy. Yet many do not do this. One wonders why they want to be part of these grassroots organisations. There are also cases where academics join women's organisations and one understands that not all members can give total commitment. But there are cases where individual academics join and that's the end of their participation. To aggravate matters, as out of touch as they are with the organisation, they state on public platforms that their women's organisation does not take up women's issues.

We are also inundated with requests from other academics, local and foreign, for interviews. We have always conceded to these requests with the proviso that we get a copy of the article or whatever document. In all my experience of hundreds of interviews I am aware of only the women's collectives who wrote *Vukani Makhoskasie South African Women Speak* who sent their draft to be read by us (Barrett, Dawber, Klugman, Obery, Shindler & Yawitch 1985).

Women academics too have limitations. Many have stated that resources are not always readily available for women-centred research. Within their

departments they have to prove that Women or Gender Studies are academically justified. The working conditions that plague other women workers, eg. minimal promotions, little recognition of the value of their work, less salary, temporary posts, affect women academics as well. It may not always be easy for them to have some sort of "working relationship" with women's organisations as they themselves are marginalised in their place of work. The few academics who do have a limited working relationship with activists are often frustrated because of the inability of activists to respond within deadlines.

Most academics, because of race and class privilege, are white and some do not, because of lack of primary research, interpret black women's experiences accurately. There have been criticisms by women in squatter areas in Cape Town about certain assumptions made in texts. Yes, it is easy to ask why organised squatter women do not write their own histories. The answer is complex but many women do not have the skills or confidence to do so. The idea of writing a book is often outside of their reality, and unless this process is facilitated for them it is unlikely to happen.

Most of the women who are therefore doing research and writing books on women are white and/or middle class and the subjects of such writing are mostly black and working class. This is the subject of a current debate. Walker challenges the criticism of Nkululeko who asks:

> Can an oppressed nation... rely on knowledge produced...by others, no matter how progressive, who are members of the oppressor nation?
>
> (Walker 1990: 6)

Walker counters her argument by the following:

> For one thing, the subjective experience of a condition or situation does not guarantee the ability to reflect critically and analytically upon it, nor does it preclude the problem of bias. For another, which social attributes one chooses to privilege in order to define the boundaries of who is or is not the legitimate "subject-researcher", the insider, is in itself a matter of political and intellectual choice: for instance, the assumption that race should be privileged above class or gender, thereby allowing black women to write about both middle class and working class black women, and, perhaps, black men to write about both male and female blacks, but debarring all whites, male and female, from writing about blacks, whether of the same class and/or sex or not.
>
> (Walker 1990: 6)

Many black women have voiced their anger at being "research objects" and ask if it means that white and middle class women are not oppressed as they are always writing about black women's oppression. This has often been referred to as academic colonialism. My response to these accusations is: It would be better if there were wider consultation or collective writing on these issues. It seems that if white women are going to continue writing about the oppression of black women, is it not emulating the very racism that we're trying to get away from? Where white people are doing things "on behalf of" blacks, would it not be better if there were more facilitation for those who have not had the ability to write their own histories?

Bazilla (1991) pleads that we learn to share our resources before we can make our priorities work for us. She correctly refers to "our legacy of proprietiness". This is easier said than done. At recent women's conferences[8] there have been resolutions about cooperation between academics and activists as well as accessing academic research. As far as I know this has not been done in the Western Cape, and I have not been able to find out whether in fact this happened in other areas. Yes, it's easy to make resolutions, but unless resolutions contain practical ways of implementing them they are seldom or never realised. Or maybe we will once again ironically, at an international conference, realise how non-existent our regional and national networks are and use this forum here, in Nsukka, to facilitate these.

Bazilla (1991: 3) refers to what the Chinese call "speaking bitterness" and appeals for more speaking bitterness and less pettiness. I agree that we need to confront areas of conflict, and racism is one of them. At a recent international Gender and Popular Education Seminar organised by CACE (1992)[9] the agenda was altered to incorporate a workshop on racism after complaints by black participants. It by no means resolved many things but it was a good start in confronting a very complex and delicate issue. Unfortunately, class was not addressed, and because of the integration of gender, race and class it is imperative that class is also addressed. Because it is an emotional issue, it was realised that a workshop was but a start, but those who felt that class needed to be addressed refrained from doing so. Whether or not it was a wise decision, I am not sure.

I have already commented on the fact that academics never return their drafts to activists. The state of emergency has been used as a reason why contents have not been checked for inaccuracies. It is disconcerting to read distortions about one's life in the sacrosanct "printed word". A veteran woman activist, after hearing about the request for another interview by a specific academic, had this to say:

> She keeps on interviewing me and writes more and more books and she buys more pillows. And I still live in the same hovel. Nothing's changed for me.

At the "Women and Gender in Southern Africa" Conference the relationship between black and white, academic and activist and the marginalisation of black women created some intense discussion. This resulted in various responses, some highly critical like that of Desiree Lewis (1992). Bazilla (1991: 3) on the other hand, is quite apologetic, stating that "There is no blame – there is just history". I acknowledge the tremendous work and effort put into the conference by the organisers. But history is not some detached omnipotent force, people are history, people make history and have made history, people benefitted from or suffered under certain historical conditions, and have challenged and changed that history. There is no way that conferences can be planned as they have been in the past. New contact lists must be drawn up. In fact the organising group should be broadened into a more representative group. Yes, it is difficult and even frustrating, but if we want to stop "objectifying" the working class and black women, they have to be part of the entire process. This process could demystify conferences and

empower grassroots women. Maybe I am being too idealistic but if the women's movements want to be alternative, then we somehow have to find ways of bringing our theories and praxis closer. Activists or grassroots women are often tired because of their demanding jobs – it's an extra meeting and not part of their wage labour. The same applies to writing papers, it's all extra labour. We could be more creative in conferencing. Many women have important experiences to share. The oral tradition could well be used here.

Many women academics have done valuable research and work and it is appreciated. It seems, however, to be more difficult to facilitate black and/or working class women to be incorporated into the writing of their own stories. Even when articles consist mostly of quotations, the women telling their stories are not acknowledged, e.g. unlike what Barbie Schreiner had done with "My spirit is not banned" by Albertina Sisulu. She included "as told to Barbie Schreiner". When women writers were asked why they did not empower black women to tell their stories and then they, the established writers (incidentally all white), just edit the books, the responses were varied: "The publishers asked me to write the book"; "There is not time"; "Yes, but not for this book, the next one maybe. . .". All very valid answers but when does affirmative action start? Are we really serious about empowering other women? Whose task is it to initiate or facilitate this process?

If we are feminists (granted there are different interpretations, but basically feminism concerns questioning the unequal gender relations and attempting to change them), we, by implication have some sort of solidarity with women less privileged than ourselves. Changing power and gender relations cannot be done in isolation from other inequalities, and gender equality can only be realised within a radical social transformation. Feminists should therefore combine theory and praxis. I also question whether one can be a feminist working in isolation without the network of other feminists. In other words, being a feminist means using feminist methodology, empowering other women. During the last four years the word feminism has become more frequently used in mass-based organisations, but it is important to add that very many ordinary grassroots women still find feminism an alienating word, something that "overseas women or white women or educated and rich women worry about". It is a challenge to all of us to propagate a brand of feminism that is relevant to the women of South Africa; an indigenous South African feminism.

But the future for women lies in working together, acknowledging our differences and commonality and devising strategies to achieve our common goals. Because women's issues and demands are marginalised from CODESA[10] (Convention for a Democratic South Africa), women from universities to the trade unions and liberation movements should stop dividing our energies and emphasising our differences.

Two attempts at forward-looking strategies are Women's Studies and the formation of Women's Alliances and the National Women's Coalition. Individual women academics have also structured their work to fulfil the needs of organisations and have felt unhappy about polarising activism/academy all the time. According to Barbara Klugman:

> Many of the women at the conference are themselves struggling against the elitism of academia. Many have engaged in participatory research at the request of grassroots organisations. Many of these academics are also activists themselves, both in universities and mass-based organisations.
>
> (Shefer & Mathis 1991)

The above view was not broadly agreed to. Shireen Hassim, one of the organisers of the "Women and Gender in Southern Africa" Conference felt that

> Activists wanted a much more subordinate intelligentsia within the women's movement; subordinated to the need to build a political base and accountable to that in their research.
>
> (Shefer & Mathis 1991)

Kabeer explains why she agrees with Hassim:

> Because research throws up unpopular findings and academics should be free to pursue those and disseminate them.
>
> (Shefer & Mathis 1991)

If the above has been academics' experience, they are justified in their caution. On the other hand many academics critique organisations without having a full understanding of them. Political organisations would benefit from regular assessment and evaluation. Strategies should then be changed accordingly to be more effective. Our women's organisations have grown through this process. However, it would be disastrous for a women's movement if this academic/activist schism were to continue or even intensify. The field of Women's Studies could be one way out of this impasse. Dubel outlines the origin of Women's Studies in the North and the way in which it links the feminist/women's movement and academia:

> Women's Studies emerged from a political and social movement outside the walls of the university. Its concerns were thus not strictly academic and its legitimacy depended on acceptance by the feminist community as well as the university. Women's Studies was seen to be the academic wing of the women's movement; committed to the goals of the women's movement (including a critique of "traditional" academic standards).
>
> (Dubel 1991)

Women's Studies is still in its initial stages at South African universities and it would do well if it, too, could be the "academic wing" of the women's movement. As I mentioned in my introductory paragraph, academia could be enhanced if there were a working relationship with women's organisations. The accuracy of its research material could be verified. This working relationship could have obviated the situation whereby, for example, a paper on the history of women's organisations presented at an Anthropology conference in Amsterdam in the mid 1980s, contained inaccuracies.[11]

Similarly, activism could be informed by sound theoretical analysis accessed by academics. As deplorable as it sounds, activists do not often have the luxury of time to read and reflect. The "unpopular findings" that Kabeer

(Shefer & Mathis 1991) referred to could render their work more effective. Strategies that have been implemented in other struggles could be shared with the women's organisations, and the women's movement could learn from the mistakes and successes of women in other countries. The list is endless.

Service organisations or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) do to a certain extent consist of both academics and activists and have succeeded to a greater or lesser extent in balancing activism with academia. A weakness in South Africa is the isolation in which sectors work, although their focuses are exactly the same. This too is the case with NGOs. Even though they see affirmative action with regard to women as their primary focus, they do not work with women's organisations. We need to redress this imbalance in communication and exchange strategies and resources. Not only will it facilitate and strengthen our work, but unnecessary duplication would be avoided.

The formation of the National Women's Coalition[12] and Regional Women's Alliances[13] could potentially be vehicles for a vibrant women's movement. The affiliates to the Coalition and the Alliances include political women's organisations, trade unions, church women's organisations, business and professional, human rights, gay women's organisations, rural and disabled women's organisations, and feminist organisations concentrating on specific issues such as rape and battery. It is, therefore, a broad cross-section of South African society with its class, race and cultural contradictions and the concomitant implications.

At the launch of the National Women's Coalition, the political differences between delegates did not prevent an enthusiastic adoption of the Women's Charter Campaign. The campaign, which ranges from door-to-door work consulting women to specialised research (i.e. both activist and academic work), aims to raise an awareness amongst women of their situation and to consult women about their problems and demands. A charter will be based on these demands. Women will then lobby to have them included in a bill of rights and constitution. Research is being done to assess how these rights can best be incorporated into and protected through the judicial system. This campaign, which has already started, is making the working relationship between activists and academics a reality.

But the women's alliances also confront us with many problems. Because of the legacy of apartheid and the divided, exploitative society we've inherited, building a true and meaningful alliance is not an easy task. The Alliances/Coalition need to be broadened to be truly representative of the women of South Africa. The challenges for us are enormous. How do we challenge power relations amongst women so that the educated/middle class/academic/white/urban/confident women do not dominate? How do we ensure that all affiliates participate meaningfully?

We have learnt from women's experience in other countries and our own, the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of the concept "sisterhood". There are inevitably different interest groups. How do we reconcile these? We need to distinguish between our short-term and long-term goals and assess to what extent these are contradictory. What will our strategies and tactics be to

realise these goals? As Bazilla said: "No one said it was going to be easy".

Maybe if we activists and academics stop emphasising our differences and commit ourselves to working together we will be working towards a women's movement. It's only when we start appreciating and respecting the others' work and understanding their problems and limitations that we'll succeed in our working relationship. It's only in realising and accepting that our work is complementary and not contradictory, that we will benefit.

I have come to realise through writing this paper that a very urgent task has arisen for us activists. If we want our ideas to be used by women academics we should be able to facilitate this process. For the past decade we have been feeling the need to document our struggle, but because of the intensity of repression and the concomitant demands on women activists, this has not materialised. And even though in the women's organisations I was a member of, we had women academics as members, we have failed to prioritise the writing of our history. We have been reactive rather than pro-active. We have been unable to balance reacting to crises with fulfilling our programme of action. Long-term goals were often sacrificed for short- or medium-term goals.

Very few of the women academics in our organisation made their skills available to the organisation. Even though the political climate in South Africa has changed, the demands on women activists have not lessened. In fact the challenges we as women are faced with have increased. Women have contributed to the changing climate, yet they are not represented substantially on decision-making forums.

To facilitate the documentation of our struggle, women's organisations should see it as their task to either audio- or video-record all main activities. A group of women activists and academics should be commissioned to record contemporary history.

Even though there are mutterings from the Apartheid state's president that "Apartheid has been abolished", all the apartheid structures are intact and the lives of ordinary persons have not only remained the same, but have been aggravated. It is also common knowledge that it does not mean that these differences will disappear overnight. In fact nothing has been done to redress the evils of the past, except for a few class concessions.

The violence sweeping our country is a major concern for all. Perhaps one of the greatest tasks that a potential women's movement can take on, is to challenge the power hungry forces, to expose who is instigating the violence. We cannot pretend that apartheid and its lackeys are not largely responsible for the context of violence.

There are many women academics and women's structures that have influence even within the regime. The time for neutrality is long overdue. You don't need to align yourself with a particular political party. The need for peace and justice is universal and above party politics.

In a country that is ravished with strife and hostility I cannot but state as a political activist that we live in two worlds; the world of the middle class/white/academics is poles apart from the world in which black people are suffering and dying every day because of violence. We have both first world

and third world conditions in South Africa. It seems as if black lives are not important. One wonders what the De Klerk regime would have done had the victims been white? Let us leave the ivory tower of objectivity and speak out for peace and justice.

Malibongwe igama lamakhosikasi!

Notes

1. The term black is used in the liberation struggle to refer to all who are disenfranchised. But all black people are not equally oppressed. In the apartheid hierarchy Indian and coloured (of mixed race) people have more privileges than African people (indigenous to Africa) e.g. the Western Cape was designated a Coloured Labour Preference area which meant, according to legislation, that certain unskilled jobs were reserved for coloured people only.
   At the time of writing this paper (early 1992) the use of "black" was predominantly used. Yet in this period of affirmative action and pre-elections it seems "pragmatic" to disaggregate black. As a classified coloured I had easier access to tertiary education than "African" women. My class position has also subsequently changed because of my education.
2. For most of my adult life I have been an activist and for the past fifteen years an activist in the Charterist women's movement. The term Charterist refers to organisations which during the time when the African National Congress (ANC) was banned, supported the ANC. The word Charterist is derived from the Freedom Charter which was drawn up by the Congress of the people (ANC, S.A. Indian Congress, Coloured People's Congress and the Congress of Democrats [whites]) in 1955 in Kliptown. It contains the minimum demands for a non-racial South Africa. (It has often been discussed in our organisation why so many white and/or middle class women "take off" from the struggle for a year or two. White and middle class coloured women have a choice whether they want to be involved in political activism or not. For most black women it is a way of life; their lives and sheer survival is a struggle, hence they do not have the luxury of choice).
3. All the pamphlets published by women's organisations in general and by United Women's Organisation and United Women's Congress, outline the "triple oppression of women", i.e. as women, as workers and as Black people and the inter-relatedness of class, gender and class.
   All women are oppressed as women and can be raped and abused by men. Yet many white and middle class women collude with men to oppress African and working class women. Black working class women are much more oppressed than white working class women, and in fact white working class women often oppress black working class women who are their domestic workers. Once again not all black women are equally oppressed. Coloured and Indian working class women have more privileges than women classified as African. SADWU (South African Domestic Workers' Union [established 1 November 1986]) and COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) publications emphasise class oppression by the progressive movement. I was unable to obtain documents outlining this argument.
4. The conditions of black people's lives in the rural areas differ substantially from their urban counterparts. In many rural areas feudal relations still exist. The white farmers "own" the workers. They therefore often sexually abuse women workers and their daughters.

5. In 1960 the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) which was formed in 1959 by Africanist dissidents in the ANC were banned. There was a lull in mass "above-ground" political activity. In the late 1970s six women in the Western Cape together with women in exile, met in Botswana to discuss reviving the women's structures. The outcome of these discussions was the formation of United Women's Organisations (UWO) which was launched in April, 1980. It was the first mass political organisation in South Africa and a women's organisation at that. Many men wanted to join and were annoyed at the women for not including them. They did the catering and child care at UWO general councils. It was the UWO women who initiated the formation of Civics, mixed organisations concerned with housing and rent problems. In April 1986 the UWO merged with the Women's Front Organisation to form the United Women's Congress (UWCO). As mentioned before, this organisations (UWCO) supported the ANC and a major campaign was demanding the unbanning thereof. After the unbanning of the ANC (UWCO) dissolved to form the ANC Women's League.
6. There has been and still is criticism that these issues are not women's issues. These criticisms were made by middle class women to whom housing, for example, was not an issue. For the women in our organisation who lived in squatter areas it was indeed a major concern.
7. Women on the first Western Cape United Democratic Front Regional Executive were all members of United Women's Congress. Cheryl Carolus, a prominent woman leader, states in "The Freedom Charter, 30 Years Later" (Kronin & Suttner 1985) that her training ground was UWO.
8. Since 1980 conferences were frequently held outside South Africa, with women from inside the country meeting women in exile. The Malibongwe Conference held in Amsterdam in January 1990 was the most publicised. It was jointly planned by the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement and the ANC Women's Section. Conferences held inside the country recently are amongst others: South African Council of Churches – Women and the Constitution (October, Durban 1990); ANC Women's Conference at University of Western Cape in December 1990; hosted by Centre for Development Studies; Lawyers for Human Rights – Women and the Constitution (Johannesburg, November, 1990); Women and Gender in Southern Africa (University of Natal, Jan./Feb. 1991); Gender and Development (Institute for Natural Resources, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, March 1992).
9. International Seminar on Gender and Popular Education (Centre for Continuing Adult Education, University of Western Cape, May, 1992).
10. Main political players ranging from the ANC to the ruling Nationalist Party are engaged in negotiations. It has been boycotted by right wing movements like the Conservative Party and more left New Unity Movement, Pan Africanist Congress, Azapo (Azanian People's Organisation). At the time of writing negotiations reached a stalemate and the ANC was considering withdrawing.
11. The paper dealt with an analysis of women's organisations in the Western Cape. The writer presented the United Women's Congress as a federal structure whereas it was in fact a unitary one. This meant that the analysis was inaccurate.
12. The National Women's Coalition was launched in Johannesburg on 25 April 1992. 56 National organisations were represented. The 350 delegates were from a range of organisations across the political spectrum. Some organisations are the ANC Women's League, the National Party, Inkatha Freedom Party, COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), Democratic Party, Young Women's Christian Association, The Girl Guides Association, Business and Professional

Women, the Rural Women's Movement and Disabled People of South Africa. The main campaign will be to draw up the Women's Charter in consultation with women everywhere in South Africa.

13. These are regional coalitions or alliances. Women's Coalition (Pretoria Witwatersrand, Vereeniging-PWV) was initiated at a seminar on August 9 1991. Women's Charter Alliance of Southern Natal was launched on 7 December 1991 with 44 women's organisations as affiliates. Women's Alliance in the Western Cape was launched on 24 November 1991. The main campaign of the alliances is to do broad consultation with women in their areas. Western Cape Alliance has also two other projects, viz., ending violence against women campaign and the Women's College. The College will initiate leadership and skills training courses. If structured courses women want are already being offered by service organisations, women will be referred to them. The Women's College will set up a working relationship with these NGOs to ensure that the courses offered are gender-sensitive.

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