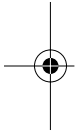


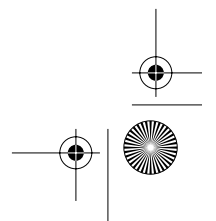
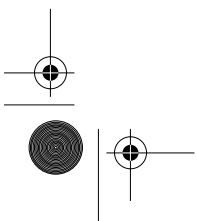
# Women and the Remaking of Politics in Southern Africa

*Negotiating Autonomy, Incorporation  
and Representation*

Gisela Geisler



NORDISKA AFRIKAINSTITUTET 2004





*Indexing terms*

Gender equality  
Liberation  
Political participation  
Women's organisations  
Women's participation  
Southern Africa



Cover photo: Jørn Stjerneklar/PHOENIX

*ANC supporters at an election meeting ten days before the first free elections  
in South Africa.*

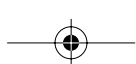
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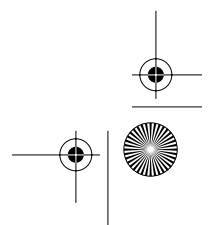
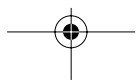
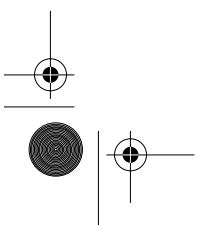
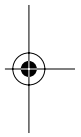
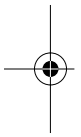
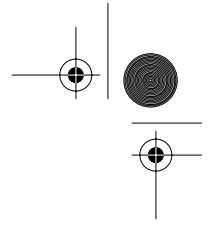
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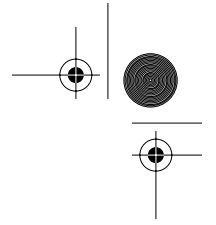
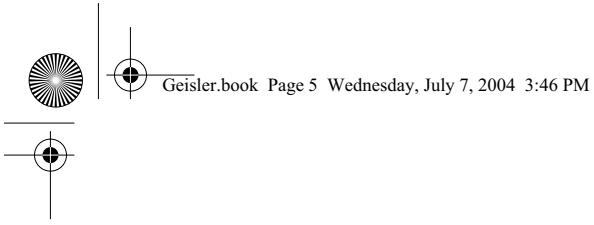
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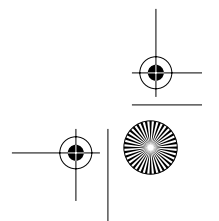
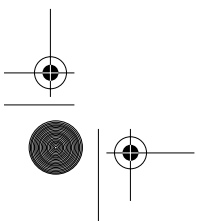
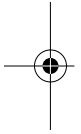
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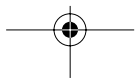
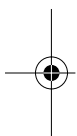




I never wanted to be a senator, because I did not know what a senator is in the first place... When I go back to my small place in Mpumalanga I make a point of going to the school where I used to teach. And people there were saying: "Oh, you have not changed. Why do you not have a Porsche car?" And I answered: "No, I do not need a Porsche car. You, the community, are my Porsche car!" I like public transport because I like to travel with other people and to listen to what is happening.

*Thembeke Gamndama*, Senator, Cape Town 21 March 1996.





## Acknowledgements

This book is the product of the contributions of many people in Southern Africa and beyond over the last twenty years. I hereby wish to express my gratitude to all of them.

It all started in Zambia in the 1980s. My interest in women's role in politics was awakened while I lived in Lusaka, being confronted daily with government controlled newspaper reports that in turn praised women "marketers" as loyal party supporters and blamed them and young professional women for the country's economic and social problems. The often ridiculous daily avalanche of news partly amused and partly concerned readers. I would like to thank Ken Good for initiating me into "serious" newspaper reading and clipping in Zambia, and into using the information, however scurrilous it seemed, as research material, an art that he excels in. My collection of Zambian newspaper clippings from the 1980s constitutes the central basis of this book.

Another friend who deserves my sincere gratitude and thanks is Arne Tostensen, former director of the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen, who encouraged me to turn my collection of clippings into a major research project into women and politics in Southern Africa. Arne offered me seed money for an explorative trip to Southern Africa and time to elaborate proposals for funding at a time when women and politics was still a not so fashionable research area.

Beyond these two fathers, this book owes its existence to many, many mothers and sisters. I wish to thank all the women politicians, all the gender activists, all the women members of women's organisations and movements who kindly made themselves available to me, for their time, enthusiasm and patience. I wish to thank all the women with busy schedules who explained, confided in and discussed with me the matters that concerned them and me.

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Members of the women's movement and gender activists who contributed to the book are too numerous to mention and those who are formally acknowledged as interviewees are but a small fraction of those I talked to, discussed with, picked up old debates with, asked to recall what happened then and tried my own insights out on. They are old friends, colleagues and new friends, sisters all, who hopefully will remain sisters after they read this book. I particularly wish to thank Sarah Longwe, Gladys Mutukwa, Attaliah Molekomme, Elsie Alexander, Ruth Meena and so many others for having remained friends for so long.

I also wish here to acknowledge the work of scholars who have written about women and politics in Africa, some of whom I have discussed with, others I will hopefully meet in the future. Particular thanks to Jane Parpart and Kathleen Staudt for guiding me through much of the 1990s and to Aili Mari Tripp for being on the cutting edge by organising a roundtable on women and politics during an African Studies Association meeting in the mid-1990s. I also like to thank all the journalists, male and female, who wrote about women in politics and women and politics, for whatever reasons, and for thus creating a historical record.

Bill Freund at the University of Natal in Durban, South Africa was one of the few who read the entire draft of the book. Thank you for spending the time on it and encouraging me when initially I could not find a publisher.

Almost at the end of this long list I wish to acknowledge the generous funding of the Norwegian Research Council which enabled me to do the research, and Den norske Bank's Jubileumsfond which enabled me to spend time writing the book. Without the interest and patience Gunnar Sørbø and the Board of Chr. Michelsen Institute showed towards the conclusion of this project it might not have come to pass, after all.

I dedicate the book to the two most important women in my life, my mother Gertrud Geisler and my daughter, Clara Good.

Bergen, March 2004

*Gisela Geisler*

## Introduction

The participation of women in national decision-making has been growing in many countries throughout the 1990s. At the beginning of the decade Anne Phillips described women's participation in national parliaments outside Scandinavia as ranging between 2 and 10 per cent (Phillips 1991:60). In 1999 the per-centage range had increased to figures of between 1 and 36 per cent, closing the gap to the Nordic countries, where percentages stood at between 36.4 and 42.7 per cent. Amongst regional averages only the Arab states fell under the 10 per cent benchmark of 1990 (3.6 per cent) (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1999).

In Africa, where women were said to have opted out of politics throughout the 1980s and patriarchal power structures were found to be hostile towards the entry of women into politics, they managed to force their way into the almost exclusively male domain with amazing speed and determination. In 1987 on average only 7.1 per cent of representatives in parliaments in sub-Saharan Africa were women, and in no country did the number of ministerial positions reach more than 4, with 60 per cent of all countries having no women ministers (United Nations 1991:39–40). Just over ten years later, in 1999, the figure for parliamentary representation of women had risen in sub-Saharan African countries to an average of 11.5 per cent. Out of the 23 countries world-wide with women representations of 20 per cent or more, four were African, all of them located in Southern Africa (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1999). In the member countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) the average percentage of women in parliaments and cabinets stood, with 15 and 12 per cent, above the rest of sub-Saharan Africa (Molokomme 2000). South Africa, with a representation of women of 30 per cent after the 1999 elections was in 1999 ranked 8th on a world-wide scale, behind the Nordic countries, the Netherlands and Germany (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1999).

Moreover, in 1997 “decades of organising and lobbying for gender equality by women NGOs in the region” led the SADC summit to issue a Gender and Development Declaration. It commits its heads of state to achieve at least a 30 per cent representation of women in political decision-making by 2005, to promote women's full access to and control over productive resources; and to repeal and reform all laws, amend all constitutions and change all social practices which still subject women to discrimination, and to take urgent measures to prevent the rising levels of violence against women and children (Kethusegile and Molokomme 1999).

These successes were, perhaps, not accidental in a region that has seen women's active participation in armed independence struggles into the 1990s and has produced women leaders who, during the UN Decade of Women, questioned Western feminists' focus on fighting personal battles against men. They

(together with other non-European women) successfully drew attention to the importance of political and economic struggles which also engaged and challenged the state from within established political movements which represented the interests of both men and women. And even though early post-colonial states largely ignored women's demands and offered them little space to challenge largely male informed politics, African women enthusiastically rose to the challenge of claiming the opportunity spaces that democratic movements and government offered through the 1990s. It would thus seem that African women's absence from formal political life through the 1970s and 1980s was not premised on a withdrawal from formal politics as a matter of principle, as happened among Western feminists, but instead represented a temporary retreat into the politics of the non-governmental sector.

The events surrounding the UN Decade of Women suggest that non-European women, and Southern African women in particular, had a significant role in initiating paradigmatic changes in the international women's movement, which led even Western women to accept engagement in formal politics as valid feminist strategy. This change of heart came at a time when Western feminism was suffering serious set-backs as a "backlash" had started to "retract the handful of small and hard won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women" through the 1980s (Faludi 1992:12).

The developments surrounding the UN Decade of Women thus managed to unite women to accept a common strategy which held that their exclusion from the state apparatus, no matter what ideology and level of economic development, was the cause of the neglect of women's specific needs and inhibited them from using the state for their own ends, such as in pushing for improvements in their social, political and economic status (Parpart 1989:5). On the other side of the equation African women expressed for the first time a willingness to address inequalities in the home, such as domestic violence, rape and other forms of gendered violence. In seven SADC member countries, for example, violence against women was ranked as one of the most important national priority areas of concern at the close of the 1990s (Kethusegile and Molokomme 1999:2). The ubiquitous patriarchy in the private sphere, which had alienated African women from Western feminism in the 1980s, had turned into an African issue too, and one that was – via demands for legislative approaches – placed in the realm of the state.

The UN Decade of Women thus for the first time brought together Western feminists and Third World women as partners. The Decade had been spearheaded by the UN Commission for Gender Equality, and feminists lobbying outside, as an extension of the UN International Women's Year in 1975. It was to remind the international community that discrimination against women ran deep in law and custom the world over and that more needed to be done not only to "promote equality between men and women but also to acknowledge women's vital role in national and international development" (Boutros-Ghali 1996:33). The UN General Assembly had agreed to the Decade in the spirit of finding new (and better) solutions to the world crisis: the decade's slogan *Women, Peace, Equality and Development* attested to such an intention.

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Yet, the unity of the UN women was not achieved easily. During the Mexico City and Copenhagen Conferences in 1975 and 1980 respectively many non-Western women were dissatisfied with the cultural imperialist way Western feminists insisted on the universality of their own culturally specific gender oppression, neglecting different histories, circumstances and priorities. In Mexico City their discontent hinged on Western feminists prioritising the inequality between men and women rather than those between developed and developing countries and races and classes as important issues. African women in particular asserted that they were able to wage their own struggles and they confessed to being “tired of any more Great White Hopes”<sup>1</sup>.

Conflicts over priorities came to a head during the 1980 Copenhagen conference, when Western participants insisted on treating the issue of clitoridectomy – the removal of the clitoris customary in a number of African countries – as the most pressing issue facing their African sisters. African women, backed by a majority of non-European women, expressed outrage over the condescending way Western feminists were “groping in their panties”<sup>2</sup> concerning themselves with African women’s sexuality in ways that were considered “demeaning, racist and offensive” (Imam 1997:17).

Western feminists in turn found African women guilty of reactionary conservatism: their refusal to endorse an immediate and full scale ban on clitoridectomy<sup>3</sup>, and their insistence on addressing general political issues, such as racism, *apartheid*, colonialism and liberation struggles at a conference dedicated to women’s issues opened them up to accusations of having “betrayed the women’s cause” (Dolphyne 1991:xi). A Ghanaian participant, Abena Dolphyne, has remembered that the meeting of government delegations in Copenhagen considered the insistence of non-European delegates on discussing general political issues as “too radical”, since it departed from safe “women’s issues” centred at the time around appropriate technology, women co-operatives and food processing. Western feminists interpreted the attempt to usurp the space set aside for women’s concerns to debate politics reactionary (Dolphyne 1991:xi).

In response Ruth Mompati of the African National Congress (ANC), the main liberation movement of South Africa, suggested that it was impossible to talk about better working conditions for women and women’s right to higher education, if even the most basic requirements for these rights were not in place: “How can we South African women talk about equality if we are not yet recognised as human beings?” (International Feminist Collective 1981:53. Author’s translation from Danish.) For Third World women “all issues were women’s issues”, including the political and economic processes that bring about poverty, deprivation and exclusion. As such, suggested Marie-Angelic Savané, the convenor of the radical Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD), even the most advanced Western women “are not totally decolonised mentally. They criticise men’s power but they use and misuse power

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1. Quoted in AAWORD1982:108.

2. Reported by Pratibha Parmar in Walker and Parmar, 1993.

3. Clitoridectomy is also known as female circumcision or female genital mutilation.

themselves, they have the strength of their status as Western women” (International Feminist Collective 1981:47).

The Copenhagen Conference was a watershed because the dialogue between Western and non-Western women facilitated the development of a “global feminism” which was possibly more advanced than Western feminism at the time. The re-evaluation of the consequences of political factors in women’s lives was an important aspect of this process. It best found its expression in the concept of empowerment, brought forward by non-European women within the network Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) whose members interpreted it in the context of a world vision “where inequality based on class, gender and race is absent from every country and between countries”. DAWN called for a new development paradigm characterised by the redistribution of wealth from rich to poor countries and greater equity for and participation of women. These two goals were inextricably linked to one another: broader political changes were not possible without women’s political clout, just as their political influence was not going to increase without serious political reform. Thus for DAWN “defining feminism to include the struggle against all forms of oppression is both legitimate and necessary. In many instances gender equality must be accompanied by changes on these and other fronts.” (Sen and Grown 1987:19)

This vision of an empowerment of women within the empowerment of the dispossessed also appealed to Western feminism and helped change its paradigm from an inward turned “victim feminism” to a new “power feminism”. This new feminism purported to embrace democracy and “push it to its own self-definition” (Wolf 1993:62, 176). Rather than “overpersonalis[ing] the political and overpoliticis[ing] the personal”, Western women were finally able to escape the “ghetto” of being “outsiders” and move to “the inside, at the centre” in order to seek (mainstream) political power (Walter 1998:62, 170).

The 1995 Beijing Platform of Action endorsed the need for women’s increased participation in decision-making and stated that women’s access to political power was fundamental not only “as a demand for social justice and democracy but also as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account” (United Nations 1996:8, 109 ff). The 1985 Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies had focused on national gender machinery as a strategy to seek influence, the 1995 Platform for Action introduced the idea of gender mainstreaming – the spread of gender concerns throughout institutions to counteract marginalisation.

Thus the Platform for Action called on UN member governments to “set targets and implement measures to substantially increase the number of women in decision-making with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through positive action in all governmental and public administration positions” including a review of electoral systems with a view to increasing political representation, and it demanded that all institutions “take positive action to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision-making positions” including attempts to remove barriers to women’s participation in decision-making. It also called on political par-

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ties “to consider taking measures to ensure that women can participate in the leadership of political parties on an equal basis with men”. The Platform of Action defined the mandate of national machinery for the advancement of women as central policy co-ordination and specified that such machinery should be placed “at the highest possible level in the government” and be allocated sufficient resources and opportunity to influence the “development of all government policies” (United Nations 1996:109–119).

It is perhaps ironic that the significant contribution of African women towards the paradigmatic changes in the international women’s movement was based on a militancy derived from their resistance to Western hegemony. On the surface at least that militancy had sought to maintain rather than challenge traditional gender roles. In fact many African women had entered the political stage in defence of their role as mothers. But even though “motherism”, a term that gained currency in South Africa (Wells 1993), has had an essentially conservative base and was not inclined to question existing gender relations, it was women’s struggle against racism that propelled them into a public domain. This move itself challenged existing gender roles so profoundly that it left women empowered to seek rights strategically linked to gender equality.<sup>1</sup>

All too often, however, women’s involvement in nationalist movements and liberation struggles led to no marked improvement in their rights and their ability to acquire influence in newly independent states. Instead African nationalist leaders of almost all persuasions dismissed what might have counted as feminist goals as divisive imperialist plots which pitted women against men setting them up as “envious rivals full of complexes”.<sup>2</sup> Women’s rights were interpreted as “divert[ing] the struggle for economic emancipation” (Chikwenya 1984) and confusing women by drawing their attention away from the “defeat of capitalism”.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike their leaders African women did not so much object to gender equity goals and women’s empowerment, but rather to Western definitions of feminism which were seen to clash with an “African-world view” identified as being “predominantly family oriented” (Kolawole 1997:11). The alternative concept “womanism”, by contrast, was held to embody “some deeper feeling, a philosophy which celebrates Black roots and the ideals of Black life” and embraced women’s liberation and the liberation of Black people, men and women from colonial and neo-colonial domination (Walker 1983:xii). Many African women felt that Western feminism questioned a collective African identity and they therefore avoided approaching gender equity goals from within their own cultural discourse, but they had also asserted that “our wish to stand up as a race, with our own specific characteristics, confronting all other races, does not involve brushing aside the problems of the African women’s deplorable situation” (Thiam 1989:13).

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1. The differentiation between practical and strategic gender interests was introduced by Maxine Molyineux in 1985 and has been popularised by Caroline O. N. Moser (Moser 1993:38 ff).
  2. Prime Minister Abdou Diouf of Senegal in 1972, quoted by Thiam 1989:12.
  3. Samora Machel, quoted in Roberts 1984:183.

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This has not been easy against the backdrop of entrenched patriarchal attitudes and interests, nor has it at all times been clearly articulated by the majority of African women. Until the late 1980s many women were inclined to go along with the subordination of their own aspirations under the broader aims of nationalist political movements, and in early post-colonial states specific categories of women were willing to engage in patriarchal bargains, putting the broader interests of their sisters behind their own immediate desire for power and influence, limited as they might have been.

However, African women clearly not only influenced the direction of the UN women's conferences but also made use of the resulting conventions and strategy pronouncements in more ways than their western sisters were able to do. In sub-Saharan Africa, the activities around the End of Decade Conference in Nairobi in 1985 offered valuable space to refocus energies, build alliances across the continent and lobby governments. The fact that the conference was held on African soil helped push the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies, and legitimised African women activists in demanding adherence to strategy documents of their governments. This proved to be important in countries which had no national gender policies activists could refer to. Preparations for the Beijing conference ten years later, which was based on a review of progress made, created further avenues to pressure heads of state into compliance, as did the Beijing action plan. One of the successes of lobbying after Beijing has, for example, been the SADC Gender Declaration of 1997.

The reason why African women chose to pursue the resolutions of the UN Decade so rigorously and with such success, would indicate that the main messages, namely the demands for women's greater role in national decision-making and political power-sharing, reflected their aspirations. The SADC Gender Monitor in 1999 praised the fact that almost all member countries had established national machinery, that a number of countries had instituted quotas and affirmative action policies to enable women to enter decision-making in greater numbers and that the number of women in national parliaments, cabinets and local councils had increased, and sometimes doubled, in countries which held elections in the late 1990, namely Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa (Kethusegile and Molokomme 1999:13). But there are also cases that defy the rule. In Zimbabwe the June 2000 national elections brought for the first time a viable opposition to the ruling ZANU(PF), Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front, into parliament, but the number of women representatives dropped from 21 to 12 (Chinowaita 2000). Zimbabwe had seen a remarkable backlash to its progressive 1980 post-independence legislation which favoured women, when the High Court ruled that legal gains women had made were not applicable to women married under customary law, by far the vast majority in Zimbabwe. Zambia has seen a rise in women's representation in parliament but a decline in local government, and while the number of women willing to stand for elections has increased substantially, relatively fewer were adopted as candidates by political parties.<sup>1</sup> Even in South Africa, where the

1. Personal information, National Women's Lobby Group, Lusaka May 2002.

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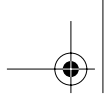
gains women have made in national decision-making rank amongst the highest in the world, traditionalism seeking to constrain women has been on the rise on the ground.

These trends go hand in hand with tensions between women in politics and women activists which go back to the 1970s and 80s when women were able to enter politics on the parameters set by men only and patriarchal bargaining and co-optation were common. They go hand in hand with the ongoing marginalisation of national machinery for the advancement of women and their co-optation by ruling parties, hampering their main task of facilitating communication between governments and the people. They go hand in hand with the personal problems many women politicians have with negotiating the role expectations of their families and communities, and of finding their way around political procedures and practices.

This book tries to address these successes and problems of African women's quest for political representation. It offers a comparative view of Southern Africa, with a focus on Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. Additional material from Mozambique, Tanzania and Kenya has been added. The case studies hang together in their geographical and historical contexts. Even though the political historical contexts of these Southern African countries differ – ranging from classic one-party states, over settler colonialism, stable democracy, armed independence struggle etc. they also have a lot in common – in particular historical periods when women's movements were restricted to male dominated women's leagues, no matter if the state was supposedly socialist, a humanist one-party state, or democratic. States that gained independence later saw women's movements that tried to avoid the pitfalls of their sisters in the region. Zimbabwean, Namibian and South African women had been in exile in Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana, and they had realised the problems women's movements had faced there. This created connections between the SADC countries, also with regard to their respective women's movements.

The material is based on almost 20 years of intermittent research which started in Zambia in the early 1980s and ended in South Africa and Namibia in the late 1990s. It is based on secondary sources as well as interviews, which were conducted with women politicians and gender activists between 1992 and 1998 in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. In addition some of the information presented here has been acquired with more qualitative research methods, born out of a long relationship with specific countries. Zambia and, to a lesser extent, Zimbabwe and South Africa, fall into this category. It is for this reason that the various chapters in this book as they combine different research techniques and span different periods vary with regard to their "feel".

During the long period of collecting the material for this book I was able to experience the changes of attitudes and paradigms not only in the subjects of my study but also within myself, as I moved from a position of feeling ridicule and outrage for what I considered then to be "pathetic" women in one-party political systems in the 1980s to an understanding of their limitations and apprecia-



*Gisela Geisler*

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tion of their achievements, which they often managed at great personal cost, many years later. When I started interviewing women politicians in 1990, I met great interest in my subjects on account of the then rare opportunities I created for them to voice their many problems and small triumphs. Today the fact that women politicians have been elevated to a fashionable topic for researchers, journalists and civic organisations alike, means the interest has given way to reticence and sometimes expressions of hostility on their part as all the hours of answering questions did not result in a real appreciation and understanding of the limitations political careers represent for many African women. This book aims at rectifying, however incompletely, those mistakes.

## CHAPTER 1

## African Women in/and Politics

### *Issues and Realities*

Debates concerned with women's relationship to the state in Africa – their engagement with or disengagement from it – go back to the 1980s, when the state as a concept was rediscovered in the social sciences. At the time feminists criticised this emerging scholarship for failing to address the differential impacts state structures and policies have on women and men and the differential influence men and women have on state actions. Rather than concentrating on gauging degrees of state autonomy, as mainstream political science did, feminists were urging the study of the relationship of the public and private spheres within the state. This focus, which had long been the core of feminist enquiry, had gained even more significance as women's organisations and national machinery in Africa raised expectations of influencing public policy in favour of women and brought to the fore questions about the patriarchal "nature" of the state which subverted and suppressed women's interests (Charton, Everett, Staudt 1989:2–3).

Critical of the Women in Development approach, which had limited its approach to questioning the impacts of development on women, feminists now questioned the links between gendered ideologies, economic interests and state power (Staudt 1986:330). Ultimately feminists were keen to investigate if the state is by definition patriarchal or if it can also be harnessed in the interests of gender equality (Staudt 1986:7–8). Their concern with how gender based distinctions are institutionalised and legitimised in specific state bureaucratic and legal orders had been stimulated by the outcome of the UN Decade of Women with its demands for state action to serve women's interests. An inquiry into the state as potentially responsive to women's demands represented a departure from previous concerns of feminist theory, shifting the focus from looking predominantly at the reasons preventing women from gaining a foothold within the state to assessing "whether and how more women in public office affect the fundamental nature and policies of the state" (Staudt 1986:13).

Initially the inquiry focused on the interface between class, gender and capitalist transformation in Africa, "showing that capitalism does not everywhere have the same effects for women" (Bujra 1986:117), that African women cannot be thought of as a single category, nor be simply analysed in gender-neutral terms 'as men' since gender was an important social indicator. Thus, while class relations were held to mediate experiences of gender, gender also qualified the positions women gained in emerging classes (Robertson and Berger 1986:14). Behind the argument sat the observation that modern states, via the artificial

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division of society into public and private spheres, had diminished women's voice and power. This observation locked into the studies of the gendered nature of the colonial state, which was held to have effectively cut off the power and authority African women had held in pre-colonial African societies.

### Gendered Processes in Colonial State Formation

"Africa", wrote Jane Parpart and Kathleen Staudt in the introduction to their influential collection of articles entitled *Women and the State in Africa*, "is a prime location in which to examine state formation, because its European derived form has been in place only a century". This, the authors believed made Africa "a key location" for exploring if "gender conflicts help shape the character of the state" (Parpart and Staudt 1989:7).

But in order to gauge the nature of the gender conflicts that arose in the clash between pre-colonial African societies and colonial states, some reference points of pre-colonial gender relations have to be known. Yet, what the literature has presented as evidence of women's social, economic and political status prior to the colonial penetration of Africa has remained scant (Parpart 1988:208–210; Staudt 1987:195; Mikell 1997a:10), and has lent itself to conflicting interpretations. Thus,

...while some pre-colonial African societies severely constrained women's political and economic power, many others awarded women clearly defined and accepted political roles which permitted them to wield power despite fairly minimal authority. (Parpart 1989: 210)

Efforts to rewrite the history of African women, moreover, while they have attempted to document women as traditional leaders, and leaders of ceremonial and messianic movements<sup>1</sup> have "tended to glorify individual African female rulers without detailed analyses of the specific historic circumstances under which they lived" (Becker 1998:259). Such accounts tended to elevate exceptional cases over the majority of women, who must be presumed to have had much less authority and political power.

In a more differentiated view Jean-François Bayart has posited "youth" and "women" as the "two subordinate categories par excellence in pre-colonial African societies" which "originate from relationships of economic production, legal relations and, of course, cultural particularities". Since these categories were socially constructed rather than based on biological differences, members of a "feminine aristocracy" were able to participate in systems of power and to enjoy privileges while amongst inferior social categories women were feared for their "sorcery" – for Bayart "a subtle inversion in the invisible world add[ing] nuance to domination" (Bayart 1993:112–113).

Gwendolyn Mikell has recently argued that traditional African societies were built on a corporate model which "acknowledges that individuals are part of many interdependent human relations" serving to maintain "the harmony and well-being of the social group rather than that of individuals" (Mikell 1997:10).

1. See for example Qunta 1987; Sweetman 1984.

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In this corporate kinship based African society the realm of the political, remained fluid because the right to political participation was derived from membership in kin units. Women were not excluded from this process and could, theoretically at least, rise to political leadership positions (Mikell 1997:17). Other commentators have been happy to acknowledge traditional African women leaders, but they clearly identify traditional societies as having been “at odds with themselves as to exactly what to do with women” because then as today “a woman’s sole right is to have no rights. She has no real power, only a pseudo power” (Thiam 1989:13).

Whatever the level and incidence amongst African women in pre-colonial societies of autonomy, power, or authority with an economic basis or a political presence, the colonial state and the capitalist penetration of kin based modes of production changed what was there. Colonialism is held to have deepened, entrenched, re-enforced, and created public/private dichotomies. This effectively removed African women from the public domain and reified them in a Western inspired domestic or private sphere.

Through the 1980s evidence had mounted that European inspired colonial ideas of male and female spaces meant that women’s predominance in production was neglected in favour of African men who were targeted for improved agricultural production techniques and cash-cropping. Ironically, involving men in agricultural production was originally held to free overburdened African women to devote themselves to their families and thus to become “proper housewives” in a European sense. Training that drew women into home-craft activities stressed this intention. By contrast colonial taxation policies forced men into wage labour, and in the agricultural sector colonial policies favoured male ownership of land and means of production against female producers and they neglected women in the provision of credit and extension services (Staudt 1989:75).

These processes meant that African men could extend their power over women, who gradually lost entitlements to land, and control over products and increasingly also their own labour, as they worked the cash-crop fields of husbands or kin as unpaid family labour. Ironically, this meant that while women’s importance in production increased, their control decreased: the ideology of the domestic domain as the proper place for women consolidated this loss of control. This “housewifization” of African women was the first step to exploiting their labour as unpaid and invisible family labour. For Maria Mies, who developed the concept with German colleagues in the early 1980s:

... the mystification that women are basically housewives [...] makes a large part of labour that is exploited and super-exploited for the world market invisible; it justifies low wages; prevents women from organising; keeps them atomised; gears their attention to a sexist and patriarchal image of women, namely the ‘real’ housewife, supported by a man, which is not only not realisable for the majority of women, but also destructive from a point of view of women’s liberation. (Mies 1986)<sup>1</sup>

1. See also the contributions in Werlhof et al. 1983.

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This feminist Marxist approach, in tandem with French Marxism, explained the exploitation of women's productive and reproductive labour as a necessary precondition for capital accumulation in the colonies. Thus, the lineage or domestic mode of production with women's labour exploited in it, reproduced the dominant capitalist mode of production under colonialism. This being so, colonial administrations had an interest in increasing control over African women, an interest that conveniently coincided with the interest of African men. Rural elders tried to keep women in the rural areas in order to lure young men and their money and goods obtained in migrant labour back to the village, colonial administrations wished to keep women in the rural areas in order to reduce the cost of migrant labour and assure its flexibility. Matrimonial laws proved the most effective way to exert control over both women and young men.

The codification of what was held to be customary law in British administered courts in Southern Africa, for example, created the platform on which rural elders were able to put forward their own biased versions of "tradition", which reconciled their own interests with those of the British administration. The codification of both real and manufactured customary African law thus developed into what Martin Chanock has aptly characterised as "the most effective way in which African men could exert influence and power in the colonial polity" (Chanock 1985). The registration of marriages and divorces, increased marriage payments (*lobola*), and the favouring of patrilineal over matrilineal rules of inheritance all contributed to greatly diminish women's ability to decide over their own lives.<sup>1</sup>

This was not a linear or entirely uncontested process, and for periods African women, particularly those who managed to stay in urban areas, were able to turn colonial paternalism into an advantage for themselves. They were thus by no means passive pawns in patriarchal struggles over them. Yet, even though in the words of Bayart, women "burst onto the scene of Africa's modernity, putting down their mark", turning the "colonial change of scale to their advantage in order to further their ancestral struggle against social elders", their actions were "as often individual as collective" and they thus failed to be revolutionary (Bayart 1993:113).

Colonial administrations often unwittingly created new spaces for women – in Northern Rhodesia, for example, the British court introduced a guilt clause into divorce procedures which effectively equalised the divorce law in the early 1920s, about the same time as it was effected in England. This allowed African women the unintended new freedom of being able to file for divorce on the basis of "customary grounds for divorce". Moreover, and contrary to African perceptions which treated adultery as a matter of mere financial compensation, British morality suggested that adulterous women were immoral and totally undesirable.

1. Literature on the subject abounds, compare the work of Jane Parpart on the Zambian Copperbelt, 'Class and Gender on the Copperbelt: Women in Northern Rhodesian Copper-Mining Communities 1926–64', in Berger, Iris and Claire Robertson (eds), *Women and Class in Africa*. New York 1986; Margot Lovett, 'Gender Relations, Class Formation, and the Colonial State in Africa', in Parpart and Staudt, *Women and the State in Africa*; Margot Lovett, "'She thinks she's like a man": Marriage and Deconstructing Gender Identity in Colonial Buha, Western Tanzania, 1943–1960'. Unpublished Paper, presented at the 37th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Toronto, Canada, 1994; Gisela Geisler, 'Moving with Tradition: The Politics of Marriage amongst the Toka of Zambia', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 26, 3, 1992.

ble to their “owners”.<sup>1</sup> The divorces issued as a consequence were misinterpreted by African men as “allowing adulterous women the untraditional liberty of leaving their husbands” (Chanock 1983:64). It was a liberty that facilitated the movement of African women between husbands best suited to provide for their needs and it thus greatly enhanced their chances of survival in urban centres.

Even when patriarchal and colonial power reasserted itself with the re-establishment of Native Courts both in rural and urban areas, women managed to stay in urban areas by making a living from prostitution and beer-brewing. When beer-brewing was appropriated by the state in a bid to increase municipal revenue in official beer-halls and in an attempt to control workers in a number of Eastern and Southern African urban centres from the 1930s onward, women staged protests and picketed municipal beer-halls.<sup>2</sup> In 1954, for example, 2,000 Lusaka women rioted against the municipal ban on home-brewed beer in Zambia (Hansen 1984:228; Schuster 1997:143 ff). In Durban and in Rand townships in South Africa women rioted against municipal beer-halls and bans on home-brewing in 1928 and into the 1930s, often resulting in violent clashes with the police. These protests were often starting points for women’s political activism (Walker 1982:53).

The reactions of urban women to colonial encroachments on their economic survival were of course also shaped by their class position. On the Zambian Copperbelt, women married to upwardly mobile African mine workers, tried to stabilise their marriages and make them more respectable. They colluded with colonial courts to persuade their husbands to give them more house-keeping money and dissuade them from using physical violence. Miners’ wives also realised that wage increases would potentially raise their own standard of living and they actively supported their men’s struggle for higher wages. Thus, for a period, urban women attended union meetings, marched in picket lines during strikes, and organised food for striking men. In Jane Parpart’s estimation women seemed almost more radical and committed to the labour struggle than their husbands (Walker 1982:155). Women and women’s issues continued to influence the demands of the African Mine Workers Union throughout the 1940s and 1950s and women continued to support strikes in 1955 and 1956 (Parpart 1986).

Rural women also tried to oppose colonial and patriarchal encroachment on their rights, but apart from a few temporary exceptions, they failed. Protest actions of Tonga women in Zambia against male dominated cash-crop production, for example, led to no results. Maude Shimwaayi Muntemba has described how Tonga women expressed their discontent by withdrawing their labour from household fields during labour peaks by returning to their matrilineal kin, where they cultivated their own fields. This technique gave women temporary respite against husbands and their unwillingness to share the proceeds from

1. Elisabeth Schmidt has described for Southern Rhodesia how colonial officials detested the apparent sexual liberties of African women, placing them “at the bottom of the ladder”; in “Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Colonial State in Zimbabwe”, *Signs, Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 4, 1991, p. 738.
2. Elisabeth Schmidt reports that beer-brewers in the mine compounds in Southern Rhodesia could in 1927 earn substantially more than an average mine worker (Schmidt 1992:94).

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cash-crop production, but it did not solve their problems permanently. Husbands sued or divorced their wives if labour withdrawal was a repeated strategy, and divorce would bring women back to their matrilineal kin, where they faced the problems of single women. Both married and single women suffered production dislocations, while they came to be more dependent on husbands to share agricultural knowledge and earnings with them, and on matrilineal kin to supply male labour and technology to them (Muntemba 1982:100).

The actions of the colonial state thus restricted women's economic power in both urban and rural areas. Women's work increased in this process while at the same time their control over means of production and products decreased. In many parts of Africa the colonial notions of men as sole actors in the public sphere also further restricted women's access to political or quasi-political positions (Johnson-Odim and Mba 1997:68; Okonjo 1983). In Southern Africa, for example, where women could be appointed headmen and chiefs in exceptional cases, colonial preference to give men such positions closed whatever avenues existed before. In Zimbabwe women's access to public life via religious roles, such as their important role as spirit mediums, who acted as key mediators in local disputes, and authority figures in situations of natural disasters, lost their political role in the clear separation between political and religious domains (Schmidt 1992:91). In Southern Africa, many women remained in one way or another dependent on men, a dependency that restricted their strategies to individual struggles for survival. It also inhibited the formal organisation of women or concerted action since their identity "remained linked to men as long as women could not support themselves" (Parpart 1986:156).

The colonial state was thus actively engaged in creating new gender distinctions and reinforcing indigenous gender stratifications. Because the dichotomy was a hierarchical one, men were allocated power and value and women subordination. The "implantation of male government under colonialism, and the depoliticization of most women's issues in the private sphere" came to be institutionalised in nationalist politics and thereafter in the modern African states. This process, Staudt and others have suggested, was further entrenched by the fact that class politics intersected gender issues. Women politicians, when and if they existed, thus tended to pursue the interests of their own class only, or advocated a depoliticised, male determined version of women's concerns and aims within formal politics.

### Gender continuities in nationalist struggles

In the 1950s and 1960s nationalist movements swept through most African countries, first the relatively non-violent set of "revolutions" mainly in West Africa in the late 1950s followed by similarly non-violent secessions in East, Central and Southern Africa in the 1960s. Zambia and Botswana, which we will look at closer later, were part of that wave of independent state formation. A second set of nationalist movements occurred in "settler colonies", including Kenya, Algeria and, with independence finally won in 1980, Zimbabwe, which we also deal with later. At the same time more self-consciously socialist and Marxist-Leninist liberation movements led protracted liberation wars in former

Portuguese colonies, namely Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique. The last armed struggle for independence, fighting against an internal enemy, continued in Namibia and South Africa until black majority rule was established in 1990 and 1994 respectively.

The statist literature of the late 1980s, concerned though it was with the gendered nature of the colonial state, paid relatively little attention to the relationship African women had to nationalist movements and the role they assumed within them, beyond suggesting that modern states, including the more gender aware socialist states, continued and entrenched the colonial disempowerment of African women (Staudt 1987:202–203, 206; Parpart and Staudt 1989:9–10). Women's political actions and history thus "disappeared in the cumulative process whereby successive written accounts reinforce and echo the silence of previous ones" (Geiger 1997:10).

Quite a different literature originated with the more orthodox Marxist feminist lobby, whose members have reviewed gender aspects of the liberation struggles in the Portuguese colonies and in Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa. In South Africa the struggle against apartheid and women's contribution towards it has been the subject of a broad range of academic and biographical work from within South Africa from the 1980s onward (Walker 1982; Russell 1989; Wells 1993; Resha 1991). In Zimbabwe and Namibia, internal accounts of women involved in the liberation struggle and analyses of such involvement have begun to emerge only recently as part of the process of coming to terms with the realities of the liberation struggle which transcend into near mythical representations (Staunton 1990; Namhila 1997; Shikola 1998). Such "reclaiming of the 'silenced' past" has also been recorded in Tanzania (Geiger 1997:10).<sup>1</sup>

Women's participation in nationalist movements, up until the late 1980s, and with notable exceptions, happened largely on terms set by men. Yet, in many countries women have been credited with having been a major driving force sometimes egging on men and taking initiatives, which surprised men and at times caused them to moderate women's radicalism (Geiger 1997:80, 82; Baard 1986:38).

Almost everywhere, however, women's specific interests were subordinated under nationalist agendas. Initially this might not have been either visible or important, since women's motivation to join nationalist movements was occasioned by their rejection of colonial rule, even though their specific experience had shaped their experience of colonialism differently from men's. When women's concerns were addressed, they were raised from within the male discourse on women's domesticity. In South Africa, Zambia and Tanganyika, women acted in defence of "motherhood". Even in cases where women were allowed into the ultimate male domains of warfare as combatants, they often ended up with tasks more attuned to their supposed domestic role relegating them to supplying a range of auxiliary services for men. By and by women's political contribution to many nationalist struggles ended in the ubiquitous

1. Also compare Likimani, 1985.

women's wing, where women's specific concerns were marginalised and depoliticised.

South African women alone were able to depart from this pattern in the 1980s. They were undoubtedly spurred on by the negative experiences of their sisters in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and later in Namibia, and helped by the fact that gender equality and political representation by then had become more generally accepted concepts backed by the United Nations.

#### Co-opted or opting out:

##### *Women and early post-colonial states*

The emergence of post-colonial African states from the 1950s onwards repeated and entrenched the gender policies of colonialism and reversed promises of women's equality which some liberation movements had proclaimed while the struggle for independence was underway. No matter what the ideological foundation of the nationalist movement and no matter what the nature of the independent state, women's concerns and gender equality were no longer central to it. From Ghana to Zimbabwe, which gained independence in 1957 and 1980 respectively, women were not represented in legislatures, party hierarchies and government positions, but were instead dressed in party colours singing and dancing praise songs for the male leadership, raising money and support.

In Ghana, women's substantial contribution to the anti-colonial struggle was acknowledged by their leader Kwame Nkrumah by reserving ten seats in the National Assembly for them. But beyond this, women's participation in Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CCP) has been described after independence as consisting mainly of "praise-singing and dancing at rallies". This included the CCP affiliated National Council of Ghana Women members "spreading cloths on the ground for party functionaries to walk on at rallies and harassing opponents of the party and its policies" (Tsikata 1997:393). In Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda established a Women's Brigade as an auxiliary to his United National Independence Party (UNIP). According to Ilsa Schuster "the men created the Brigade, directed its organisation, policies and activities and appointed its officials" to such a degree that it was called "an all-men affair". Men even decided when and where the Brigade was to meet and what its members were to discuss (Schuster 1993:17). Members of the Women's Brigade dressed in party colours and sang and danced for their male leaders and "visiting dignitaries at the airport" right through the decades from independence until the democratic change of government and demise of the one-party state in 1991.

In Zimbabwe, where women had fought in the liberation war as combatants, independence saw only few women in government, and many more in the streets and at the airport singing and dancing for their male leaders and their guests (Hove 1994:33-37). Female members of the African National Union ZANU(PF) were still rounded up and transported to rallies and to airports to perform this function in the mid-1990s. In Mozambique, despite the state initiated ban on traditions detrimental to women's dignity and emancipation, officials of the ruling Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) party enjoyed

female party members performing versions of women's initiation dances on national holidays through the 1980s, for their own and FRELIMO's glory.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the dominant political parties in post-colonial Africa created dependent and co-opted existing women's organisations. These were used as vehicles for the state to control and circumscribe women's political participation and they gave the state a means to mobilise women on its own terms, rather than offering them a possibility to gain representation within the state (Waylen 1996:11). Versions of what Amina Mama has called "state feminism" have co-opted older, less educated middle class African women willing to "propagate highly conservative ideas, never failing to remind women of their primary obligations as wives and mothers" (Mama 1997:418). In some countries they have been used by male bureaucracies to lead campaigns against younger progressive women, who were, in fact, willing to sacrifice their biological role for the economic and social freedoms of a professional life.

The co-opted nature of women's politics has meant that many women, privileged to have access to the state, have (ab)used their position to discredit progressive women's aspirations and to entrench women's subordination in the private domain. The fact that certain women were prepared to engage in what Denise Kandiyoti has called "a patriarchal bargain",<sup>2</sup> has been interpreted as a way of maximising their own interests in a limited opportunity space dominated by men and it has been treated as an indication of the trajectory of patriarchal hegemony in African societies, which has been able to suppress potentially counter hegemonic female accounts of the world (Crehan 1997:133).

In his contribution to *Women and the State in Africa*, Robert Fatton has suggested that the marginalisation of African women was a direct consequence of the lack of ruling class hegemony in post-colonial states. African states were, in his view, characterised by a fusion of state power and class power with the ruling class grappling with the establishment of hegemonic rule to replace the exercise of coercion and domination with the politics of consensus. Lacking legitimacy, the ruling class concentrated on defending its own corporate interests to the exclusion of the interests of subordinate groups. In this context gender was used as "a means to consolidate the closure of classes". Part of this process was blocking entry for independent and autonomous women by "eliminating their independent organs of representation and by reducing their participation in decision-making" (Fatton 1989:47–48, 53, 57). Yet, because the state was "soft" and therefore unable to penetrate all sectors of society, women, who did not wish to take part in the limited political space provided, or who wished to remain "uncaptured",<sup>3</sup> were still able to withdraw from state institutions in order to engage in autonomous activities which do not fall under the purview of the male dominated ruling class.

1. Signe Arnfred, 'An Analysis of Female Initiation Rites in Mozambique', Part 4, unpublished manuscript, n.d., p. 6.

2. Denise Kandiyoti, quoted by Waylen 1996:18.

3. The concept was developed by Göran Hydén with regard to the African peasantry, which remains uncaptured by the weak African state, on account of the fact, that it operates in an alternative mode of production (Hydén 1983).

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The fervour with which Parpart and Staudt have suggested that African women have been alienated from the political process because it remained of little use to them, has created a false polarisation between the co-option of formal politics and the autonomous space of not doing politics. Thus divided, women politicians and women activists appeared to be universally opposed, and the nature of autonomous women's spaces remained unexplored. What, in fact, constituted the supposed autonomy of the private as against the public sphere? Did women just disappear, as it were, into their own private realm, or did they "find new ways of doing politics"? (Waylen 1996:17)

More recently Aili Mari Tripp has started to address these lacunae when she suggested that in Uganda African women have been hampered in their participation in public politics by their status in the household and the family. This has forced women to enact politics in the quasi public spaces of women's clubs and the private arenas of households "as an alternative to the exclusions and marginalisations they face in the more conventional political arenas" (Tripp 1988:93). She has further argued that politics is not the prerogative of political parties alone, but also includes "families, clans, churches, district development associations, market places, local self-help groups and parent-teacher associations" and even households since

... many of the national-level struggles over access to resources and power are played out at the household level. In spite of their different level and scope, household conflicts are every bit as 'political' as the struggles that 'engage' the state, but with consequences of differing scope. (Tripp 1988:87)

While community organisations do not constantly challenge the state, their members engage in struggles over resources and power in the public arena, and they are able to confront the state when pressed to do so (Tripp 1988:93). Indeed, she contends that the reason why women operate from the restricted platform of associations and community organisations is the result of constraints rather than a conscious disengagement. This might suggest that many African women might have been pushed into a position of exclusion not by choice but by male dominated structures at the household level.

That women might just have been waiting in the wings to seize the first opportunity to re-enter politics has perhaps been demonstrated by the fervour with which they supported democratisation efforts. The demise of one-party states in Africa has with its introduction of democratic ideals introduced the idea that women should be represented in politics as a matter of social justice. African women activists were first to argue this point, which was later picked up among Western scholars. Gradually aspects of lobbying for increased political representation were addressed, and issues of affirmative action for women in politics, such as quotas and particular voting systems were raised. It was a slow process, however, which took longer than the process towards democratic elections.

**Opting in:**  
*Democratisation and the “second liberation” of women*

In a review of the development of the Zambian women’s movement since 1975, Bonnie Keller reported in 1989 that “the divide between the politicians and the professionals in the women’s movement has not completely disappeared but it has been partially bridged over”. Her optimism at such signs of change was based on the observation that “a new working relationship between the national women’s machinery, as part of government, and professional women active in the women’s movement” was developing, with the former soliciting the assistance of professionals in the analyses of gender issues and policy strategies. Increasingly even the ruling party’s Women’s League was seeking such assistance (Keller 1989:18), courting the very women whose lifestyle its former members had derided as immoral and un-Zambian in the past.

African professional women for their part were obviously more willing to associate themselves with organisations that they in turn had condemned as not being able to represent their interests. Ruth Meena, herself a professional woman and a feminist, for example, criticised her Tanzanian sisters 1992 for remaining detached from formal politics and she blamed them failing to challenge gender repressive African states by denying the women’s movement intellectual leadership (Meena 1992:18).

The gradual rapprochement between professional women and women politicians was partly facilitated by the establishment of government based national machinery for the advancement of women, in accordance with the Forward Looking Strategies of the 1985 UN Conference for Women in Nairobi. National women’s machinery, even though dominated by ruling parties or one-party states, provided a more neutral meeting ground between women activists and the state than had previously been possible in the women’s wing of the ruling party. In Zimbabwe, for example, the Ministry of Community Development and Women’s Affairs – one of the first such structures to be established in Southern Africa in 1980 – initially offered professional women the opportunity to advise government on issues relevant to them.

National machinery was, however, not able to change the relationship between NGOs and government organisations entirely. Thus while NGOs approved of the possibility to interact with these institutions as mediators between themselves and government, they also resented too avid an interest of the national machinery in their affairs. In Zimbabwe the threat of encroachment of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs on the autonomy of the NGO sector led to the renewed withdrawal of professional women.

In addition, as the 1980s progressed national machinery remained largely isolated and proved to have had little influence on government policy. Many governments responded to UN directives in terms of welfare or they “let programs shrivel back for lack of budgetary commitment” (Staudt 1987:205). Appointments of civil servants to such units, moreover, frequently sacrificed professional qualification to party loyalty. Many of the units were chronically underfinanced and they remained dependent on external funding, fixing activities even more on a Women in Development (WID) oriented policy level. Lack

of funds also often led to shrinking staff, which went hand in hand with organisational downgrading.

Attempts of women professionals to lobby for the establishment of regional women's desks meant to circumvent restrictive national circumstances, such as through the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC), never moved beyond the planning stage in the 1980s and came to be realised only in the mid-1990s.

If professional women had hoped that the establishment of national machinery would allow them to influence government policy, while they remained autonomous, such hopes were dashed as the 1980s came to a close. By then, too, the economic crisis on the African continent had deepened and structural adjustment policies, prescribed by leading financial institutions and donors, had been shown to have worsened the economic and social position of the majority of African women.

Interestingly, the gendered aspects of the economic crisis in Africa sparked off a renewed interest in women's relationship to the state, this time from an economic point of view. In the early 1990s feminist economists challenged Western liberal economic theory which presumed that markets are gender neutral and that men and women have potentially equal access to and benefit from the market. Reproductive labour was treated as a natural resource that can be infinitely stretched and is thus assumed to cost-effectively replace the social functions the state has to shed as part of redirecting resources towards production. The heightened dependence economies placed on women's unpaid labour suggested that they would be further removed from the public sphere and from markets, leading to a broadening and deepening of the divisions between men and women in African societies (Elson 1991).

The management of Africa's economic crisis heightened a feeling of powerlessness in many women, not only as victims of economic policy approaches but also as members of the NGO sector with activities moving from the public into the ever broadening private sphere of self-help and survival. Social issues were thus depolitized again, leaving NGOs, and women who mostly run it, to take over state responsibilities, rather than the other way round. In light of the economic policies, women-based NGOs thus had the propensity to turn into a "really existing cynicism".<sup>1</sup>

The cynicism of the broadening of the invisible private sphere was, however, juxtaposed by the promise of democratic reform, advocated, and externally enforced concurrently with economic reform programmes, itself a cynicism of a kind (Riley 1992:549). For many professional women, who saw their already restricted political space contracting further as the economic crisis reaffirmed their location in the private sphere, the opening of the one-party state towards multiparty democracy was perceived as opening up an opportunity to claim a political space in the mainstream. Writing about Kenya, Maria Nzomo has remarked that with the repeal of the one-party state in 1992 the excuses given by women for not participating in politics, were no longer valid:

1. Claudia von Braunmühl quoted in Wichterich 1992:15. (Author's translation from German.)

With the onset of multiparty democracy and the freedom of expression and popular participation that ensued, women will have no one but themselves to blame if they do not seize the opportunity to ensure that their interests are included and mainstreamed in the new democratic agenda and that they participate on equal footing with men in the democratisation process. (Nzomo 1993:11)

For many other African women the democratisation process represented itself as a “democratic struggle” (Nzomo 1993:11), a term that put their fervour close their involvement in liberation struggles. It was a second liberation of a kind, and like the struggle against colonialism where women had assumed roles that were considered uncharacteristic, women took an unusually strong political stand in the democratic transformation processes. Aware of the pitfalls of their sisters within liberation struggles, they were prepared not to “miss the boat a second time round” (Nzomo 1993:11).

In Zambia, where the multiparty election of 1991 ended eighteen years of one-party rule, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) had attracted many young professional women at a time when it was still a pressure group lobbying for democratic change. The MMD leadership generally gave the impression that gender issues were deemed important and professional women, who had been alienated by the politics of the Women’s League were actively invited to join. The movement promised to end the culture of women’s marginalisation in women’s party wings, and assured them that the pinnacle of that culture, the ubiquitous dancing at the airport and at party rallies, would stop forthwith (Mukula 1992).

The women who actively joined MMD thus had hopes of becoming part of a new culture of people oriented politics.<sup>1</sup> Many had “realised that you cannot stay away from politics, because then you just do your thing in the corner and you are never going to make a change in there”.<sup>2</sup> The promise of democracy changed the outlook of women’s organisations from passive sensitisation to the much bolder aim of participation. The concept of women’s empowerment had come to be imbued with political content.

Democratic aspirations also broadened the scope of NGOs, who increasingly made it their business to lobby governments and political parties for the greater representation of women in politics, to offer support to women political candidates and to educate the electorate on the need to support women. The arguments they advanced were based on the concept of individual rights, that women also had the human right to both vote and be elected. Later, arguments came to include the concept of group interests to back the demand for a critical mass of women to enter parliament. The National Women’s Lobby Group in Zambia caused considerable confusion, acrimony and anger when they chose to embrace a non-partisan policy approach, which supported women candidates of all political parties, no matter what their political philosophy.

The Women’s Lobby Group thus came to be the first broad-based coalition in support of women’s political interests in Africa, both in terms of achieving a better gender balance in parliament, as well as in terms of getting women’s

1. Interviews, Lusaka, 24 January and 4 February 1994.

2. Interview, Lusaka, 11 January 1994.

empowerment issues onto the agenda of new governments, the political parties and into civic education campaigns. For the first time the coalition included members of political parties and non-governmental organisations in a setting that was not imposed by government making it a potentially powerful alliance of women's interests.

Subsequently the pattern set by the Zambian Women's Lobby Group was emulated in other countries faced with similar scenarios. As time passed and the new MMD government had clearly reneged on its promises to their constituency of women, pressure groups elsewhere tried to rethink and adapt the strategies originally used in Zambia. Within a short span of time, formal political engagement moved from being perceived as the ineffectual singing and dancing of uneducated and co-opted Mamas' to a respectable and desirable option to the NGO movement.

Kenya's 1992 multiparty election also spawned women's lobby groups that worked towards achieving a critical mass of at least 30–35 per cent of women in legislative bodies. They even went so far as to propose a prominent NGO women's leader, Wangari Maathai, as their presidential candidate (Nzomo 1993a:65). In Kenya, too, many women had realised that NGOs had not been able to sufficiently "influence many legal issues that directly affected their status and well-being" (Nzomo 1997:241). They were spurred into formal politics because the prospect of multiparty democracy placed a high premium "on political empowerment as a means of achieving other goals associated with the advancement of the status of women". Thus they wished "to exert decisive influence to ensure the repeal of laws that discriminate against women" and the design of development policies (Nzomo 1993a:65).

The spirit of political empowerment also had an effect on countries that did not experience transitional politics within their own borders. In Botswana, a multiparty democracy since independence in 1965, professional women had also felt that their interests were not represented by the main political parties and they had thus, as elsewhere, opted out of formal party politics. But the 1994 general election gave cause to the largest women's organisation, *Emang Basadi*, to lobby for greater representation of women in parliament and for the inclusion of women's issues in the manifestos of political parties contesting the election. The strategies pursued by *Emang* also included women voter education and support to women candidates on a non-partisan basis. The drawing up of a Women's Manifesto after consultation with a broad cross-section of women and women's organisations, was inspired by the success and wide appeal of South Africa's Women's National Lobby (WNL) and their Women's Charter in the run-up to the historic 1994 elections in that country. The WNL has remained the most successful broad-based alliance of women's organisations in Southern Africa.

In a somewhat different, but without doubt connected, development professional women have emerged in formal politics in Zimbabwe since the 1995 parliamentary elections. Since there were no lobby groups to encourage them, perhaps they were encouraged by the example of Margaret Dongo, the former ZANU(PF) MP who challenged the party's refusal to nominate her. Dongo

stood as an independent candidate and finally took her seat when she managed to win a case against the government for rigging the election in her constituency. Her powerful defiance and criticism of male dominated ZANU(PF) political culture also had an effect on voters, who came forward to encourage women to stand as candidates in their constituencies. The argument raised in favour of women's representation by voters suggested at the time that women pursue more selfless and caring politics than men do.

Despite these successes, however, the relationship between women politicians and women activists has often remained tense. The support for women candidates at election time has at times not been translated into long-term mutual support networks. Once elected to office women politicians have remained suspect to the women's movement, even if they have been drawn from their own ranks. It seems as if members of the women's movement have continued to cling to their conviction that politics corrupts and co-opts its office holders to such a degree that they cannot be trusted to pursue gender equity goals any longer.

**Being in from without:**

*The new relationship between women activists and women politicians*

The democratisation process in Southern Africa did not only encourage women's political involvement, but it also encouraged the formation of NGOs. In Zambia, for example, 23 women's organisations participated in a conference on constitutional reform in 1994 (Ferguson and Ludwig 1995:23). At the same time participation and membership in the women's wings of political parties declined.

A number of factors might have been responsible for this. Membership in political party wings had to a large degree been determined by the desire to access state patronage and resources. Many members of the UNIP Women's League in Zambia, for example, were drawn from amongst women marketeers, whose economic pursuits came to be dependent on UNIP patronage available only via active membership in the UNIP Women's League. Party vigilantes would through the 1980s "round up market women", harassing them with accusations of being "price sharks" and of being anti-nationalistic elements, unless they could produce UNIP membership cards. The opening up of the political system removed these immediate pressures on ordinary women to participate.

In addition, and on the other side of the equation, external donors reacted to the democratisation of African society by boosting their support to the NGO sector, in order to advance "civil society". Within this process, the attention of the donors shifted from income-generation and self-help as appropriate NGO project activities to activities more closely focused on civic education, participation and empowerment. NGOs swiftly responded to the shift in interest towards civic rights education, and election monitoring. Lobby groups advancing women's participation in politics had become another successful formula to access donor funds.

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Yet, even though political office has been officially endorsed as a valid, and indeed necessary, avenue to pursue gender politics, the relationship between women politicians and women activists has in many countries remained marked by mutual suspicion and animosity. In 1994 a survey in Zambia revealed that only one of the thirteen women in the national parliament considered the work of women activists in the NGOs supportive of women politicians, including groups whose explicit purpose was the promotion of women in politics. The vast majority of women politicians complained of a lack of support, a tendency of women activists to isolate themselves, and a general lack of interest in promoting issues important to women's equality in parliament. Some believed that women activists were just out to advance themselves (Ferguson and Ludwig 1995:24). Earlier data confirmed these sentiments in Zambia and also in Botswana and Zimbabwe. In Zambia and Botswana women politicians expected members of women's lobby groups to be more forthcoming in offering support, also as members of political parties (Geisler 1995:570 ff). Women activists, in contrast, believed that women politicians had let the women's cause down, in that they placed party politics above gender politics and did not address gender issues as aggressively as women activists would have hoped for. Yet, activists themselves were adamant of retaining their status of remaining outside politics.

The relationship between women activists and women politicians has thus been marked by unfulfilled, and often unrealistic, expectations and demands, creating a gap which is difficult to bridge, even as women's activist groups organise workshop after workshop discussing the problems and limitations institutions and societies impose on women politicians.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, while the women's movement has been very active publishing the findings of such consultations, stressing the cultural, social and party political pressures women politicians face, its members have also never ceased to blame their "political sisters" for those same limitations.

It is perhaps for this reason that women activists have never put all their eggs in one basket. Increasing the number of women in mainstream political life has been one strategy, improving on the performance and location of national machinery has remained another. As mediators between the demands of the women's movement and the government, and as quasi "non-party political" channels of placing political demands, the national machinery has remained of particular interest to the NGO sector in general and the women's movement in particular. Despite the bad performance of these institutions through the 1980s, their usefulness was reconsidered in the contexts of both the processes of democratisation and the advancing debate about gender mainstreaming through the 1990s. Both contexts have offered further avenues for increasing the effectiveness of the national machinery as channels of information and influence for gender activists. Ultimately, too, even though gender activists might have remained unwilling to enter the politics of political parties, positions as civil servants on

1. See for example: 'Using the Democratic Process to Promote Women's Rights'. Seminar organised by the Zambia Association for Research and Development (ZARD), February 1, 1992; 'Gender and Democracy in Africa', workshop hosted by the U.S. Agency for International Development, July 27, 1995.

gender desks or in women's departments – careers as femocrats – have continued to be more desirable options.

South Africa, again, has been an exception. Here divisions between women politicians and women activists could not develop to any real extent after the 1994 elections because most of the women who entered parliament then were leaders of the women's movement. They left a vacuum in their wake which led to a (temporary) decline of the women's movement. The problems and experiences of women activists in parliament will present us with further insights also with regard to neighbouring countries.

### **Electoral systems, affirmative action and the conceptualisation of women politicians**

Women have had varying success with strategies to increase access to political participation. Women politicians have often been disappointed and frustrated by the barriers that prevent them from even being considered for nomination, and with some exceptions women members of parliament have not fared well in ministerial appointments. Women activists, in turn, have been disappointed by the lack of influence women politicians have had in addressing concerns considered relevant to them. With only small representation of women at the national legislative level, governments have found it easy to drag their feet about legal reforms, and about putting more adequate national machinery for the advancement of gender equality into place.

That numbers change matters dramatically has been shown in South Africa, where women have, thanks to the quota system introduced by the African National Congress (ANC) for internal party nomination processes prior to the 1994 elections, achieved the critical mass in the South African parliament. But quota systems work best with a list system for nominations, and most Southern African countries have constituency based nomination and election procedures, in which women do not fare well to start with.

Up until the 1980s the interest of political science in women's participation in politics had been restricted to considerations of their voter behaviour. Liberal political theory, of course, considered women's entitlement to vote and to political office only as a manifestation of their rights as individual citizens. Later work considered the nature of political representation of women, the circumstances under which political institutions are responsive to female citizens (Shapiro 1981:702), and the effect of women's participation in politics on the nature of politics, and the effect of politics on women (Randall 1982). Scholarship thus increasingly sought to answer if women should be represented because they are women, implying that they have specific interests as a group that differentiate them from other groups and thus warrant separate representation. The suggestion that women share interests that are different from men's, and that these interests cannot be represented by men, was, of course, an outcome of the feminist movement's suggestion that women experience the world different from men because they are universally subordinated to men. The assertion that women as women experienced disadvantages that needed to be overcome by specific legislation further raised the spectre of affirmative action.

Norwegian women had in the 1970s succeeded in entering politics in unprecedented numbers when they shifted their arguments for representation from a gender-neutral point of view to one that focused on the political relevance of gender differences. They maintained that “women and men have fundamentally different experiences in terms of how they live and see the world, mainly because of the division of labour by sex, only women can truly bring the views of women into government and other institutions”.<sup>1</sup> Legitimising gender as a relevant social characteristic in need of broader representation in governing bodies, led to the establishment of party based gender quotas of 40 per cent from 1973 onward, covering all but one major party by 1989.<sup>2</sup>

Affirmative action policies for women in Norway and other Scandinavian countries were, moreover, helped by strong equality and group rights discourses. In other national contexts both in Western Europe and Africa quota systems have not been favoured, nor have they been consistently applied in the countries which adopted them. In South Africa, only the ANC applied a gender quota in the 1994 and 1999 national elections. Other parties did not follow suit, even though many increased the number of women candidates between the two national elections. Moreover, none of South Africa’s political parties applied a quota in the local government elections, where the representation of women has been correspondingly lower (Chan 1996). In Namibia, by way of contrast, parliament enacted a gender quota applicable to all political parties and civic organisations contesting the first local government elections since independence in 1992. The provision stipulated that party lists had to include at least two women in respect of local authority councils of 10 or fewer members and at least three women for councils with 11 or more members. In 1997 the affirmative action clause for local government elections was strengthened by increasing the minimum number of women required on any given party list in preparation for the 1988 local government elections (Hubbard and Kavari 1993; Tjihero, Namalambo and Hubbard 1998). Yet, in national and regional elections no quota system has been in use, nor has its application been seriously discussed. Other African countries, such as Tanzania, have enacted a gender quota for reserved seats in parliament only (Dahlerup 1998:97).

Even though gender quotas have been proven to be very successful in increasing the number of women in political bodies, they have caused mixed reactions, and they have many enemies even amongst women politicians. Much of the debate has focused on notions of “the equality of opportunity” – exemplified by the fact that women are entitled to stand for political office like men – against the “equality of outcome or result”. The latter notion suggests that equal opportunity is not given due to formal barriers the effects of which will be mitigated by a quota, thus creating equality of result (Squires 1996:75).

One of the most commonly used arguments against quotas is that they contravene the principles of equal opportunity and that they are “undemocratic” since they over-rule voter preferences. Another argument put forward by both

1. Norwegian feminist activist quoted in Bystydzienski 1995:44.

2. Norwegian feminist activist quoted in Bystydzienski 1995:49.

men and women holds that quota systems entrench and reify rather than alleviate gender differences. Instead of moving into positions at the mercy of men, women should strive to get there in their own right, not on the strength (or weakness) of being a women. Many women politicians who would benefit most from a gender quota believe that being elected in this way considerably decreases their credibility towards their male colleagues, rendering their position even more difficult. Electoral systems which are based on a list system reduce the danger of losing credibility somewhat, whereas quotas applied to special reserved seats in parliament, by appointment of the president, for example, increase these problems. In Tanzania, for example, the application of a quota for women for reserved seats in parliament has come to mean that women are largely restricted to that avenue of advancement, leaving constituency based seats for male colleagues.

France has seen the birth of the parity movement in the 1990s, whose members demand numerically equal representation for women and men in decision-making bodies via fifty-fifty per cent allocation of electoral lists. They refuse the application of quotas because they “turn women from sexed individuals into social groupings with a presumed set of common interests and needs”. Parity is thus not about the representation of “women’s interests” but about the recognition of the political legitimacy of women. And this, the followers of parity maintain, has nothing to do with either party affiliation or with women acting politically differently from men. Instead of quotas members of the movement defend affirmative law enforced action because in order for women to become equal, they first have to admit they are not equal. The parity movement thus “involves the simultaneous assertion of a particular identity – one that has been ascribed as the justification for exclusion – and a denial of the salience of that identity for purposes of political inclusion (Scott 1997:6, 11). In 1999 France introduced a constitutional amendment mandating a 50 per cent representation of women in all elected assemblies. It has since been applied to Municipal elections, where the law has effected a doubling of female representatives in smaller councils (from 25.7 in 1995 to 47.5 per cent in 2001) and less impressive gains in urban municipalities (21.7 to 33 per cent).<sup>1</sup>

*Les paritaires* suggest that sex should not be a relevant criterion ruling participation in politics, but many others maintain that women have indeed specific interests, which need representation. Yet, many question also if gender quotas are really a proven means to ensure the fair representation of women. What, they ask, is a fair representation of women? Do women always represent women’s interests? Are there really unified women’s interests that can be represented? South African social scientist Sheila Meintjes has suggested that notwithstanding the divisions between women, what binds them “together as a group is that, in comparison to men, they are politically powerless. It is this powerlessness, as a group, that provides the basis for common interest. And that interest is in being represented in all forums of political decision making.” Women’s powerlessness as a group is, according to Meintjes, created by social

1. Observatoire de la parité entre les femmes et les hommes, ‘Une avancée décisive pour la démocratie’, Paris 2002.

attitudes and structured inequalities in the political system that needs to be overcome by affirmative action (Meintjes 1999:4). Other commentators have explained the powerlessness of women based on the suggestion that “there is nothing like a ‘women’s culture’ in the sense in which it can be spoken of as the ‘culture of a community’”. Instead, any supposed “culture of community” is in reality a “male community”, “inasmuch as males establish institutions and develop practices to protect old privileges” (Balibar 1995:67–68).

Similarly, Kate Crehan has maintained that for a group to have a sense of constituting a particular political identity, “it must also have its own understanding of its location vis-à-vis other groups in the political landscape it inhabits”. She talks about rural women in North-Western Zambia who in her estimation did “not have anything like coherent and explicit, alternative female accounts of the world in which they lived, with which they explicitly challenged dominant male hegemony”. Men had the power to stifle such alternative accounts (Crehan 1994:2).

If women were a group, this would also suggest the existence of objective women’s interests. Based on her work on the 1979 revolution in Nicaragua Maxine Molyneux divided interests into practical and strategic gender interests, those interests based on needs in women’s placement within the sexual division of labour and those “involving claims to transform social relations and women’s position therein”. For Molyneux women’s interests are an effect of women’s social/structural location and they are linked to identity formation. Claims about women’s objective interests thus need to be framed within specific historical contexts, since, she asserts, “processes of interest formation and articulation are clearly subject to cultural, historical and political variation” (Molyneux 1998:230, 233). Given that women occupy different social and political positions within any given society and historical context, we must assume that definitions of what constitutes women’s objective interests differ between women, countries and historical periods.

On a more practical level the debate about representation and interest boils down to the observation that numbers of women alone do not guarantee the representation of whatever is defined as women’s interests. For any number of reasons women might represent a constituency made up of men, women and children, rather than women only; they might feel compelled to represent the position of their party rather than their own position or that of the women’s movement; they might represent the interests of the religion they believe in or the interests of the women of their own class or race.

On the other hand, if quotas bring in critical numbers of women, they are more likely to represent a broader section of women’s interests, and they are also more likely to be able to influence both policies and institutions in favour of women’s interests. Ideally a critical mass of women would for example be able to sufficiently change the position and policy of their political parties as well as the political culture generally to enable them to increase their numbers to representative levels even without the help of a quota. The influence women members of the African National Congress (ANC) have had party policies and

women parliamentarians on the political culture of parliament is a case in question, which will be discussed in more detail below.

However, the debate about representation obviously lies at the heart of the tensions between women politicians and women activists, and its implications might also cause tensions between women politicians, across party lines and within parties, denominations and races. Women activists often feel that women politicians, once they have arrived in positions of power, do not use that power in women's interest. Women politicians, on the other hand, feel that activists define women's interest too narrowly as their very own interests. One former woman Minister of Energy in Zambia in the mid-nineties complained bitterly that her dedicated work with the commissioning of wells in rural areas had been completely overlooked by the activists: "I am more gender sensitive when I am at the YWCA and discuss domestic violence."<sup>1</sup> The same minister also stated decisively that since it was her political party and "old rural women without teeth" in her constituency who had supported her election she felt more allegiance to them rather than women activists, who had not supported her campaign beyond rhetoric.

Just how complex it is to define women's interests, and to represent them, has also been exemplified by the difficulties parliamentary women caucuses, which operate across party lines, have had to get off the ground. In South Africa the inter-party women's caucus in the 1990s was given neither sufficient financial support from parliament nor the time for its members to meet outside the lunch hour. Moreover, the male party bosses of the minority parties were not happy about the caucus fearing that it would "be high-jacked as an ANC front, and we were just being used as a pawn or decorations, so that they can say they are impartial".<sup>2</sup> "In the estimation of many MPs in South Africa's parliament class, race and ideological divisions have run far deeper than the unity of being women."<sup>3</sup>

If quotas are highly contentious, electoral systems and their effect on women's chances to be successful as political candidates have caused less acrimony. Comparative studies have come to the conclusion that women tend to manage best under national party list systems and do worst in majoritarian systems in single member constituencies. In such constituencies party selection committees are likely to hesitate to choose a woman candidate, since she might be considered an electoral risk. Party lists of proportional representation systems, by contrast, seem to indicate that parties have an interest in including women in order to appear to be balanced:

... with a list of names it is unlikely that any votes will be lost by the presence of women candidates on the list. And their absence may cause offence, by advertising party prejudice, thereby narrowing the party's appeal. (Norris 1993)

Moreover, electoral systems based on proportional representation make the application of affirmative action possible against male prejudice and opposition.

1. Interview, Lusaka, 4 February 1994.

2. Interview with a woman member of the New National Party, Cape Town 19 March 1996.

3. ANC MP Jenny Schreiner, quoted in Davis 1995.

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In single member constituency systems, men tend to be very protective of the few opportunities they have to enter political office and they are not likely to share them with women. In constituency based electoral systems women tend to be relegated to constituencies that are likely to fall to the opposition or are otherwise unattractive, because of their inaccessibility, the prevalence of violence or general backwardness. In political systems where the number of parliamentary seats and corresponding constituencies is very small, as is the case in Botswana, women might find it almost impossible to wrest a constituency nomination from a male party colleague and they have to rely much more on entering parliament via special seats.

Proportional representation systems offer advantages for women's increased participation but they might also have drawbacks in that representatives are detached from the people they are supposed to represent and that they are accountable to their party bosses rather than to their voters (Reynolds 1999:9). This might mean that women find it harder to influence their party towards more gender friendly policies, and that their dependence on the party leadership for their position, which cannot be bolstered by voter preferences would, for example, restrict a woman's ability to raise issues that are not (yet) part of the party policy. In addition, in South Africa, women parliamentarians felt the lack of contact with their constituents as a drawback, making them feel isolated and in need of a lobby to back their demands both within their political parties and in parliament.

Discussions around affirmative action measures, such as quotas, and the choice of electoral systems to increase women's political representation have in the Southern African context featured through to 1990s only in Namibia and South Africa, the two countries that gained independence latest and at a time when the international pressure towards women's increased representation in politics had gained ground. This would confirm the contention that both quotas and electoral systems have the best chance to be accepted with new beginnings, as it were. Once procedures are established such changes are much harder to achieve – in Zambia and Botswana for example, the call of women activists for quotas has only concerned special seats in parliaments, which are at the discretion of the president rather than political parties. But even such restricted calls for quotas met with widespread resistance, even from among women politicians. In Zambia, rumours circulated after the 1991 elections that the National Women's Lobby's call for a gender quota on appointed parliamentarians was motivated by the interest of the gender activists to be appointed themselves to such positions. Such allegations put further strains on an already tense relationship.

## CHAPTER 2

## Women's Participation in Nationalist Movements and Liberation Struggles

### *Fighting Men's Wars*

African women of differing backgrounds and educational attainments joined anti-colonial political movements after their inception across the continent often in the face of the resistance of men. Many sought their inspiration in their role as mothers, intent on working towards the betterment of society for their children. Whatever women's motives for joining nationalist struggles their fervour was, consciously or unconsciously, linked to the hope of gaining personal liberation. Whatever the ideology of the liberation movement, the level of participation, and the historical context, moving into the public arena of struggle resulted for women in increased self-confidence and sharpened skills in identifying aspects of their own oppression.

Nationalist movements and liberation struggles ultimately represented, however subtly, an opening of women's own radius of action, and a significant departure from their previous life. This has also meant that unlike their male comrades they started to question – however rudimentarily – prescribed gender roles. The leaders of early nationalist movements, by contrast, never even acknowledged women's specific gender interests, and the concessions made later on by the leaders of Marxist and socialist inspired movements were dictated by doctrine and strategic need rather than a willingness to question existing gender ideologies. It has therefore not been surprising that the changes of gender roles that marked the time of struggle remained largely time bound and rarely carried over into independent states.

#### **Early nationalist movements:** *In women lies "the total hope for progress"*

Many of the women who joined nationalist movements in the 1950s were part of the new generation of urban African populations, who had developed lifestyles that were no longer strictly "traditional", even though traditional values remained an ideal. Urban life had not only whetted women's appetite for consumer goods, and a longing for a middle-class social existence, but it had also equipped women to move beyond ethnic boundaries to a more trans-ethnic identity as Africans which helped them question the strictures of custom, and 'traditional authority'. Because women pursued in some way or another a double agenda, seeking national and personal liberation, they were, in the words

of nationalist leader Sékou Touré “the most dynamic force because in them lies the total hope for progress”.<sup>1</sup>

The younger urban African men who formed and joined nationalist movements were “modern” enough not to oppose the participation of women outright. Hortense Powermaker has characterised the generation of African political leaders in Northern Rhodesia in the 1950s as “not only breaking from the domination of Europeans, but also from their own fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and other tribal figures”. Their youth and defiance made them seem like brothers rather than symbols of parental authority, which leader-follower relationships would have normally been fashioned after (Powermaker 1962:315). This shifting locus of intra-African power relations and the changing nature of African leadership might have further emboldened women to join movements.

Yet, the ideologies of the young African leaders had little to say about women and their double oppression. Julius Nyerere, for example, has been credited for having once written a college essay on the subjugation of women in African society, but he was not much troubled by the “women question” thereafter (Geiger 1997:69). Kenneth Kaunda’s humanism was clearly “Man-centred”, applying humanist principles of dignity, equal opportunity and communalism to “Man” (written with a capital letter) only: his *Humanist Handbook* did not once refer to women specifically, not even under the heading “Extended Family” (United National Independence Party 1976).

But in rural areas, where the force of traditional restriction was stronger, women also joined anti-colonial activities, because “to be is to resist”. Women in Luapula Province in Northern Rhodesia organised political meetings and helped hide nationalist leaders in the 1950s. One of the women leaders, Losa Lukande, has explained that she participated because she was angry about the treatment their men received at the hand of Europeans. As an example she mentioned colonial administrators putting tax evaders on scaffolds, “burning green leaves to smoke [them] out of resisting” (Poewe 1981:107). In rural Mwanza, in Tanganyika, women joined the nationalist cause because their “hope was that the people of Tanganyika would be one and remain united without discrimination”. They also hoped “that when we get self-rule, we would not be oppressed by men, like in the past. We would be free to go anywhere.” (Geiger 1997:142–143)

Recognising the force of women, nationalist movements and colonial administrations vied for control over them. In Tanganyika the sites for this struggle were girls’ and women’s clubs, which had been established by the colonial government with the intention of “domesticating” African women. In the 1950s these clubs came to be seen as targets of nationalist political parties for “vote catching and fund-raising”.<sup>2</sup> In Kenya, too, the government-initiated *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake* women’s groups were used by the colonial government as an outreach to “put a brake on extremist men” active in the nationalist guerrilla movement Mau Mau. The clubs were, beyond “tea and buns” supposed to “provide

1. Sékou Touré quoted in Little 1973:64.

2. Social Development Officer quoted in Geiger 1998:112.

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rallying points for women who are opposed to Mau Mau" (Staudt 1987:201). Women, moreover, were forced to join the clubs in order not be cut off from essential services provided by the colonial administration. This came to be particularly important in "guarded" villages that were under the "protection" of the colonial administration, where being a member of the women's organisation made "the crucial difference between survival and starvation for many women".

Yet, women also joined Mau Mau in large numbers. Wambui Waiyaki Otieno became a Mau Mau member in the 1950s, working in Nairobi as a scout doing reconnaissance and intelligence work for the movement. Otieno has described how she and her comrades posed as prostitutes in bars frequented by British soldiers and accompanied them to their barracks in order to obtain guns: "Any method that could secure arms for us was acceptable." (Otieno 1998:39) Similar techniques of obtaining guns have been reported from rural areas (Edgerton 1990:128). At times Mau Mau also used women in combat roles, "sometimes leading men in battle" (Edgerton 1990:122; Oduol 1993:26). But women made up only five per cent of the total guerrilla army, being more numerous in a "civilian army" (Kanogo 1987:145), or the "passive wing" of Mau Mau. The tasks of this wing included carrying food into the forests, hiding fire-arms and transmitting messages. According to commentators these represented tasks that made the guerrilla warfare possible, even though they might have attracted little attention (Oduol 1993:27).

Otherwise Mau Mau 'legislation' governing camp life ruled that women's work in the camps "should be fetching firewood, cooking and serving the whole camp, cleaning utensils, mending warriors' clothes and washing clothes" (Barnett and Njama 1986:222). The 1953 legislation also granted women the sexual freedom to be able to choose their own partner in Mau Mau camps (Edgerton 1990:222). Liberating as this might have sounded, it was a rule meant to stop the widespread sexual exploitation of female soldiers. Officers "had reserved women for their exclusive [sexual] use", while others had been "shared by many men" (Edgerton 1990:118).

If female recruits were expected to use their sexual allure to gain access to the enemy, such liberties were strictly restricted to warfare (Presley 1992:152). Otieno, for example, even though she worked within Mau Mau, had three children by a man she could not marry because her father was opposed to the union (Presley 1992:33). The Mau Mau leadership also supported female circumcision as an expression of Kenyan nationalism against British cultural imperialism (Presley 1998:4). Differing positions over it had split Kikuyu Land from 1928 onward, with nationalist forces opposed to the ban which had been pronounced by missionaries and was adhered to by Christian Kikuyu (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966:105 ff). The initiation debate had created a situation where women were "the pawns in the struggle for dominance between missionaries and traditional Kikuyu interests" and thus the "pivot point in the differences between two groups of males". Yet, the debate also drew women into the political arena, many taking sides with the nationalists against the church, turning "circumcision from a custom into a cause" (Presley 1992:102, 176).

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Male leaders of nationalist movements might have encouraged women to join, but this did not mean that women's families and husbands approved, even if they themselves were active members. On the Muslim Kenyan coast in Mombasa, the late 1950s did not see many women able and willing to stand for office in political clubs. Men theoretically approved and encouraged the participation of women, but, as Shamsa Muhamad Mushashamy has reported, if you found a woman willing to stand for office, "then her husband or uncle would refuse" (Mirza and Strobel 1989:110).

In Tanganyika, the most prominent women figure of the nationalist struggle, Bibi Titi, could not simply accept the tempting invitation of the Tanzania African National Union (TANU) to enter the Central Committee, nor could the party simply offer her the position. Instead its members approached Titi's husband to persuade him to allow her to take up the prestigious seat.

Involvement of Titi in politics was affected by her role in the domestic sphere. It was necessary to seek endorsement from the head of the household *because TANU was not interested in challenging the patriarchal authority of households* (emphasis added). (Meena 1992:46)

Titi's husband agreed with her political work, but her mother did not, blaming him for letting her join TANU: "Does he want my daughter to be lost?" (Geiger 1997:60)

In Zambia, too, women were not as free as they might have hoped to join the nationalist cause. Foster Mubanga, an organiser for the United National Independence Party (UNIP) on the Copperbelt, has recalled that women were not coming forward to be volunteers because even if they themselves were willing, their husbands refused, because "they would not allow their wives to work together with other men". Many women also feared that they would not find the time to do their housework and look after their children. Foster Mubanga was lucky, because the party delegation that went to seek permission from her husband for her to become a movement activist returned with the message that he was willing to let her go.

Mubanga has recorded the conversation between the UNIP delegation and her husband, giving us a valuable insight into attitudes towards women's participation in politics at that time. UNIP officials explained to the husband that permitting his wife to suffer for the country also meant taking a burden on his shoulders. The burden would, they suggested, consist of being without his wife for weeks on end. The absence of a wife not only meant having nobody to cook and wash for him and be sexually available, but also implied that she might seek sexual gratification elsewhere. In addition friends and neighbours were likely to tease the husband, accusing him of not being a man for letting his wife go, since only a "dead man would allow his wife to sleep from place to place and work alone among men", and they would try to inflame his anger with rumours about his wife's misconduct. Nonetheless, Mubanga's husband assured the UNIP delegation. He responded very uncharacteristically: "Even if they send my wife to sleep in villages far away from here in the bush, when she returns, she will still be my wife." (Mubanga 1975:32)

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Foster Mubanga found working for UNIP exhausting as she travelled “like the devil” around the countryside on a bicycle to organise UNIP branches, “carrying one child on my back and one child on my bicycle frame”. Yet, she thanked her husband for granting her permission to be part of the nationalist struggle, particularly since she knew that “he suffered because I never washed for him, I never ironed; and he used to eat badly prepared food because I had no time to cook” (Mubanga 1975:34, 39). At least, she looked after his children even while she was riding her bicycle in the service of national liberation.

B.C. Kankassa, who in independent Zambia turned into Mama Kankassa, the chairperson of the UNIP Women's League, had a husband who was involved with the nationalists, and who was supportive of his young wife joining them. She was amongst the educated elite, having attended one of the three boarding schools for girls in Northern Rhodesia and had obtained a certificate as a social worker. She has recalled having been shy about men coming to the house for political meetings. Even when she got interested in their cause and had become a card-carrying member of UNIP, this shyness did not disappear entirely:

Even when you were preparing a meal [for them] you feared that you could not join them. ‘Oh, come sister, eat with us’, some said. I was shy because there were men who would not like to eat in front of a woman.<sup>1</sup>

Other prominent women's activists in Zambia's nationalist movement had to fight the prejudice of their families and their people. Princess Nakatindi Yeta III, a member of the Royal Lozi family in Western Zambia and a prominent member of UNIP, recalled that “it was in those times for a woman unheard of to dirty her hands with politics. Some people thought that I was mad. My family disapproved strongly.” And Zeniah Ndlovu, who later rose to prominence in the UNIP Women's League, has remembered that “people called us a lot of things. It was just not our tradition to live the way we did”. Being educated, she suggested, made matters worse<sup>2</sup> (Schuster 1983:20–21).

That national liberation was a far step from personal liberation for women was also indicated by the fact that the early liberation movements, as already mentioned, had no explicit policy on women. Even though this is not surprising given that in the 1950s the discourse on women's liberation had not even progressed in Europe, the fact that women's subordinate status was not addressed at the time hardly helped the women who were allowed to participate and restricted the space they could claim for their activities.

The Women's Brigade of UNIP represented a respectable place for women where their moral reputation could be guarded. But it came at the price of limiting its members to supportive roles only. Brigade members were “not intended to seek political power for themselves” but they were “helping men to achieve political power” (Schuster 1993:18). Such sentiments were confirmed by the recollections of Mama Kankassa. Her interest in politics came slowly and for some time she did “not behave like an activist – no – I was helping them and I was carrying a card”. When she became more active in 1955, she saw her voca-

1. Interview, Lusaka, 17 January 1994.

2. Interviews quoted in Schuster 1993:20, 21.

tion in outdoing her male comrades in recruiting new members. Kankassa, it seems, never harboured ambitions towards personal liberation or such an aspiration was not allowed to flourish in UNIP: “Our lobby was not to confront men, it was begging [them]. ... And with an honour.” (Schuster 1993:18)

Brigade members did the catering at functions, housed nationalist leaders, raised funds for the movement, and participated in UNIP Funeral Committees, burial societies on the Copperbelt that organised “occasions at which the dead could be suitably honoured” (Harries-Jones 1975:100). The committees had been introduced by UNIP to woo membership in that UNIP presented itself as a quasi-uterine brother to the deceased, the nearest male relative, in order to inspire confidence and thrust.

Women’s Brigade members’ tasks in the committees consisted of blocking off the roads to traffic before the mourning procession began, in order to ensure orderly single file mourners on either side of the hearse. Thereafter they supervised the linking of children’s hands around the grave, leading the singing which moved from traditional tunes through hymns to political songs. They also organised the collection of maize meal, money and wood for the meal to sustain the mourners (Harries-Jones 1975:104 ff).

The Women’s Brigade did, however, also have more political activist members. One of them was Julia “Chikanomeka” Mulenga, a financially independent elderly widow, who later received the honour of being called Mama UNIP. Mulenga organised women protests against colonial oppression, including the colour bar. In some of the protests she led women to bare their breasts in order to express anti-colonial sentiments:

We walked naked down Cairo Road. We just wanted the white man, particularly Roy Welensky [the Premier of the Central African Republic], to know that the African people were the only people who could build their own nation, not them to build the nation for us.<sup>1</sup>

Even though the connection between the flaunting of female sexuality and national liberation might be a tenuous link, the action of the otherwise prudish Women’s League must have had the approval of the male leaders since Mulenga has also recalled stripping in front of British Foreign Secretary, Ian Mcleod, in the period leading up to independence at Lusaka airport as “the most amusing incident in my life”. The Minister had come to Lusaka with proposals for a constitution for the independent Zambia not approved of by the Black majority. He was confronted by Mulenga and other “weeping naked women” causing him to weep in turn.<sup>2</sup> In 1986 she was honoured by the President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, for her service to the nationalist struggle.<sup>3</sup> When Women’s Brigade members bared their breasts in support of UNIP against the United People’s Party (UPP)<sup>4</sup> in 1971, however, the action of the women was considered an undignified exposure of “half-naked women” who should have better sense and “leave politics to politicians”.<sup>5</sup>

1. Quoted from an interview in ‘Mama UNIP Dies’, *Times of Zambia* (Lusaka), 21 June 1986.
2. *Ibid.*, and ‘Chikamoneka is dead’ in *Zambia Daily Mail* (Lusaka), 21 June 1996.
3. ‘Mama UNIP unique’, *Times of Zambia*, 28 June 1986.
4. The UPP was the opposition to UNIP before Zambia was made a one-party state.
5. Newspaper clips quoted by Schuster 1979: 164, 165.

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Despite the restrictions, both imposed within the nationalist movements and in society at large, women were able to move into a public political terrain, where they were able to act in ways previously impossible. Mama Kankassa has recalled with fondness how she met “together with men according to my own conscience”, other testimonies that have been published, do not deny the fact that women enjoyed the freedom of “moving with men”, of speaking publicly, and of travelling on “business” as it were. The accounts often recall these achievements proudly, as if those recalling them were still astonished that they had been possible at all. The fact that these activities happened invariably within the ambit of a women’s wing was not surprising. It was perhaps the only way that husbands, fathers, communities and perhaps women, themselves, could be persuaded to accept women’s presence in politics. Women members of nationalist movements at that time did not complain about the restrictions imposed upon them, but instead valued the small spaces they gained. Dissatisfaction and disappointment only set in after independence, when their achievements were not honoured in the ways anticipated and dreams of personal liberation did not come true.

**The Marxist anti-imperialist struggle:**  
***“Women’s emancipation is no act of charity”***

Unlike the first wave of nationalist movements the Marxist-Leninist inspired liberation movements which began to gain ground in the early 1960s, tried to include women much more consciously and as a matter of policy. The inspiration, however, did not stem from the women’s movement but was based in the Marxist doctrine of liberating all human beings, including women. Based on Friedrich Engels’ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* Marxism maintained that women were subordinated to men, since they had suffered a “world historical defeat of the female sex” with the emergence of private property in the hands of men. Private property necessitated male control over women’s production and reproduction and as a consequence “the man took command in the home also, the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children”.<sup>1</sup> The emancipation of women was thus a matter of economic independence, guaranteed by their integration into the workforce of a socialist society.

The Marxist project considered women’s emancipation a necessary – and automatic – outcome of the socialist transformation of society. Samora Machel, the leader of the liberation movement in Mozambique, Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) stated very clearly in 1973 that:

The basis of the domination of women lies in the system of economic organisation of society, private ownership of the means of production, which necessarily leads to the exploitation of man by man. This means that, apart from the specific features of their situation, the contradiction between women and the social order is in essence a contradiction between women and the exploitation of man by man, between women and private ownership of the means of production. In other words, it is the same as the contradiction between the working masses and the exploitative social order.

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1. Friedrich Engels, quoted in Aaby 1977:25–27.

He did not believe that women's subordination was the result of "contradictions" between men and women but "between exploited people, both men and women, and the social order". For Machel and his age-mates elsewhere, feminism was a capitalist offensive to divert attention from the struggle (Machel 1981:24, 25).

Machel's colleague Antiono Agostinho Neto, the leader of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) also identified economic independence as the backbone of women's liberation, because it would enable a woman "to solve all the problems of her life as she pleases, and not be obliged, not be subject to following another individual, a man, ... who holds back, hinders and prevents women's freedom".<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite the recognition that "men had too much control over decision-making in the lives and actions of women", both liberation movements clearly understood women's liberation as being subordinated under the struggle against capitalism. Thus the MPLA believed that "women's struggle for liberation must be seen as a part of the more general struggle against capitalism, to build socialism and communism, never as an isolated struggle directed against men" (OMA 1984:39).

The reluctance of national liberation movements to recognise women's liberation as a related but separate cause from national liberation was, of course, premised on the observation that women "are potentially a formidable revolutionary force", a fact which had already been recognised by the early nationalist movements. In Guinea Bissau, for example, explained Franscesca Pereira of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), another Marxist inspired liberation movement in West Africa, "it was the women who were the easiest to mobilise" because they realised that the revolutionary liberation of their country "was a great opportunity for their liberation. They knew the attitudes of the party, and understood that for the first time in the history of our country, *they would be able to count on political institutions to safeguard their interests* (emphasis in the text)".<sup>2</sup>

Women thus represented an anti-colonial force that could neither be ignored nor allowed to pursue its own agenda. PAIGC guidelines thus urged its members in 1960 to "defend the rights of women, respect and make others respect them" and the leader Amilcar Cabral promised peasants in 1966 that "we are going to place women in high-ranking posts, and we want them at every level from the village committees up to the party leadership". Yet at the same time he also left no doubt about the price women had to pay for such recognition: "The women must hold their heads high and know that our party is also their party" (Urdang 1979:123–125).

Other nationalist leaders also expected women to give the liberation movement their full attention. Machel believed that "in order to liberate themselves, women must internalise FRELIMO's political line and live by it in a creative way". This creativity meant for women "the involvement in tasks laid down by the organisation". This was to be realised in an organisation set aside for the mobilisation of all Mozambican women, the Organisation of Mozambican

1. Quoted in Organisation of Angolan Women (OMA) 1984:36.

2. Quoted in Urdang 1979:124.

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Women (OMM), which was in Machel's words "integrated in FRELIMO, inspired by FRELIMO's revolutionary line, acting as a part of our revolutionary family's harmonious body, in the context of the structures of FRELIMO" (Machel 1981:30). Other Marxist liberation movements, too, established women's wings, whose aims and activities were subordinated under those of the movement.

The establishment of women's wings was initially welcomed by the growing number of women sympathisers. Zimbabwe African People's Union, (ZAPU) Secretary for Women Affairs, Jane Ngwenya, explained in 1979 that the women's structure, with sections, branches, districts, provinces, and a national executive had facilitated the mobilisation of many women and helped build women's confidence in being chairpersons, office holders and in conducting meetings (Ngwenya 1983:82). When the newly established Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) Women's Department held its first conference in Xai Xai in Mozambique, while in exile, ZANU leader Robert Mugabe explained that "by waging the armed struggle [the party] had created a process generative of forces that will result in the total liberation of the women" (Mugabe 1984). And the Organisation of Angolan Women (OMA) believed that its purpose was to mobilise Angolan women patriots for the tasks of national liberation: "The important thing is not to do what each person wants to do, but what needs to be done to make our liberation struggle advance" (OMA 1984:87-88).

PAIGC directives suggested in 1960 that women had to be persuaded that "their liberation must be their own achievement on the basis of their work, dedication to the Party, self-respect, personality and decisiveness toward everything that can act against their dignity".<sup>1</sup> In this endeavour "the party will exercise complete control".<sup>2</sup> Machel also believed that "the domination imposed by society, by stifling their initiative, often prevents [women] from expressing their aspirations, often prevents them from thinking how to wage their struggle". The greatest obstacle to women's emancipation will thus be "created by women themselves, by their habit of dependence, their passivity and the dead weight of tradition they carry over from the old society". It was for this reason that FRELIMO "formulates the line and indicates the methods of struggle" (Machel 1981:21, 28). Both statements seem to indicate that the attitudes and practices of men who benefited from the "obscurantism of tradition" most, were not to blame: while colonialism conditioned men, women's attitudes were their own fault.

Nationalist aspirations had also grown in Namibia since the 1940s, and by the 1960s saw two major nationalist movements, the South West Africa National Union (SWANU) and the broad based South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), who were forced into exile by South African repression soon afterwards. In 1966 SWAPO entered the armed struggle for national independence, and established a separate women's wing in 1969 in exile in Tanzania, in order to enhance the mobilisation of women (Becker 1995:139). At the time "there were only four or so women" who were active in SWAPO in exile.<sup>3</sup>

1. Quoted in Urdang 1979:124.

2. Cabral quoted in *ibid.*, p. 125.

3. Ellen Musialela quoted in Amina Mama, 'SWAPO Women's Council', *African Woman*, Autumn 1988; Ellen Musialela, quoted in Davies 1983:84.

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The tasks of the SWAPO Women's Council (SWC) were defined as to make women conscious "that they have the same rights and obligations as men to make decisions concerning their nation's interests" and that women should therefore act as comrades rather than as homemakers.<sup>1</sup> For Sam Nujoma, the leader of SWAPO, the founding of the Women's Council represented the formal recognition of the importance and "the will of the Namibian women to effectuate their revolutionary participation in the national liberation struggle".<sup>2</sup>

Initially the movement was led by nationalist ideals which later became suffused by revolutionary socialist ideology (Lapchick and Urdang 1982:65). Specific concerns of women were, however, clearly subordinated under the major priority of national liberation. A participant in SWAPO meetings has recalled that through the 1970s "if an address was to women, then it was for them to mobilise women to participate in the same struggle [to liberate the country]. The main aim at that time was one and one only."<sup>3</sup> (Becker 1995:144)

Addressing gender issues within the liberation struggle was considered divisive. Ellen Musialela, then an executive member of SWAPO, and later a SWAPO MP, explained in 1985 that the role the Women's Council was defined as to educate women that "the struggle we are waging is not to fight among ourselves as men and women but to fight the regime, to wipe it out because apartheid itself is a government that separates people by race and sex".<sup>4</sup> Talking about her aims in the liberation struggle an active member of the Women's Council explained that:

The only thing the liberation struggle took forward was to liberate the nation from the colonial apartheid. Women's issues were there, and we realised that women needed to be mobilised for this struggle, but it was not like liberating women from patriarchy. That was not really the issue, at least not for the liberation struggle. I did not have that idea of liberating myself from the patriarchal yoke.<sup>5</sup>

Even later when the Women's Council addressed the 'women's question', both in exile and within the country, the idea was still that "liberating the nation was liberating the women as well. That was in terms of our biology, that we were human beings like them and mothers and wives, that was different, but we did not look at patriarchy." Thus many of the SWAPO Women's Council projects in the exile camps were restricted to nurseries, hospitals, schools, literacy campaigns, vegetable gardens and weaving projects (Mama 1988:348), "because people thought this is what women should do".<sup>6</sup> Thus, another SWAPO stalwart explained: "Women were looked at first of all as mothers, and most of the mobilisation was as mothers in the struggle, mothers fighting for their children, for their nation... but when it came to power sharing that was the problem".<sup>7</sup>

Despite the lack of a clear approach to the "women question", women joined SWAPO activities and in so doing *inter alia* addressed gender inequality.

1. Quoted in Soiri 1996:83.

2. Quoted in Lapchick and Urdang 1982:113.

3. Quoted in Becker 1995:144.

4. Quoted in 'Namibia: An Interview with Ellen Musialela', *Race and Class*, 27, 1, 1985, p. 82.

5. Interview, Windhoek, 3 December 1998.

6. Interview, Windhoek, 3 December 1998.

7. Interview, Windhoek, 3 December 1998.

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Rural women, such as in northern Namibia, became very involved in supporting guerrilla fighters, supplying food, shelter and hiding places. Through the late 1970s and 1980s many young female pupils who were disillusioned by the Bantu education system and the lack of opportunity in a violent apartheid system, left the country with the intention of taking up arms. They were also “anxious to see what is on the other side of the country” and to leave parental control and authority behind (Shikola 1998:139).

### **Women entering the world of warfare and combat**

Many of the new women recruits of SWAPO, ZANU, ZAPU and FRELIMO, wanted to join the army and move into direct combat. Girls were not interested in being sent for education, because “oh, I do not want to even go to school. I say no, how can I go to school! I am a soldier, I am coming to fight.” Disappointed about the fact that boys were selected for the front, very young women lied about their age to be admitted, smuggled their way into vehicles headed for the front, hoping they might be allowed to stay.<sup>1</sup> Civilian camps were shunned as boring and difficult places, and civilians were looked down upon as “political and military illiterates” who “were helpless and could not defend themselves”.<sup>2</sup>

When Margaret Dongo joined the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) at the age of 15 with three female friends she knew what she wanted, that was “to be trained, to fight and to return to Zimbabwe”.<sup>3</sup> Yet, she has also suggested that she and her friends were “just four little girls” who “had such childish ideas. My friend wanted a gun to shoot her stepmother, and I decided that my first victim would be a policeman who had run after my mother and made her fall when she was pregnant.”<sup>4</sup> Personal as these reasons might have been they formed the basis of many girls’ desire to receive military training.

In 1979 Jane Ngwenya of the Zimbabwe African Women’s Union (ZAWU) the women’s section of ZAPU, explained that:

In Lusaka we have a very large number of refugees, but all these women did not come as refugees, they didn’t mean to be refugees, those with children meant to leave them with the party and train to go and fight. But because of the children and the ages and the needs of the children we have said to those mothers, please look after the children with us. (Ngwenya 1983:83)

Given that gender roles were not changed substantially in civilian camps, but were questioned more strongly in military camps, military life offered a much broader scope for women’s personal liberation.

The world of warfare was perhaps particularly attractive to young women, expressing their desire and hope for personal freedom. Testimonies of women fighters in the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) involved in an armed struggle against the central government of Ethiopia from 1975, have suggested that peasant women were particularly keen to become women fighters, because

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1. Interviews with former exiles, Windhoek, November/December 1998.
  2. Interview, Windhoek, 3 December 1998.
  3. Quoted in Spicer 1998.
  4. Quoted in Braid 1998.

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“it was one way of balancing their inequalities”. Young girls also entered the army to escape forced marriages with a much older man (Druce and Hammond 1990:69).

That the very nature of the involvement in independence struggles, be it in the army or as a civilian activist, challenged gender stereotypes has been documented by participants. An ex-combatant in ZANLA, later a member of the ZANU(PF) government, explained that the armed struggle posed a dilemma that could only lead to the promotion of women’s emancipation:

That time, with our culture it was a dilemma being in the struggle, where you find yourself facing this situation where you make decisions concerning your life. We did not have the Age of Majority then – women were second rate citizens. So, being independent for the first time, you had to make decisions that really affected your own life without having to consult your parents or some other superior. So ... it was important for women to understand why it was important for them to behave like they were equals of their male counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

In Zimbabwe it was ultimately the realities of the struggle that forced men to admit women into the armed struggle:

We could not win the struggle without the help of women. It is like a family, the two have to contribute. So later when women started to join in then women also participated equally in terms of sharing ideas. Because this struggle actually was not made for men only and the people that you were going to deal with in terms of mobilisation when we were moving into war were women. The people that were cooking food for the fighters were women. So there was a need for the two to work together.<sup>2</sup>

That it was the necessities of war – a broadening of the revolutionary base – that led to the promotion of women<sup>3</sup> was also admitted by Sally Mugabe, wife of the leader of ZANU, Robert Mugabe, when she spoke at the 1980 UN World Conference for Women in Copenhagen. She explained that “the protracted struggle for liberation forced some realities upon our own tradition” because every human resource was needed.<sup>4</sup> In 1984, four years after independence, Mugabe was able to admit that “the original view of the party shown during the first years following its ban was to recruit only male cadres for military training and female training for academic and secretarial courses. ... the belief we had then, which obviously was a mistaken belief was that only male cadres could prosecute an armed struggle”.<sup>5</sup>

In Mozambique a similar reluctance to admit women into the liberation army underwent change as more soldiers were needed: “In the beginning it was mainly men who took part in the war. The women continued to work in the fields at home. But then we began to be aware that the women should not stand aside. This was everybody’s war.”<sup>6</sup> In the late 1960s the controversy about

1. Interview, Harare, 16 February 1994.

2. Interview, Harare, 18 February 1994.

3. Mike Kesby, ‘Arenas for Control, Terrains of Gender Contestation: Guerrilla Struggle and Counter-Insurgency Warfare in Zimbabwe 1972–1880’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 22, 4, 1996, p. 563. He quotes a number of sources that support this contention with regard to both Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

4. Sally Mugabe quoted in Lapchick and Urdang 1982:101.

5. Quoted in *Herald*, 16 March 1984.

6. Hauwa Subed, quoted in OMM, *Women of Mozambique*, Bergen, n.d., p. 17.

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women's participation had led to the expulsion of a group of FREMILO cadres, who "rejected the participation of women in the armed struggle" by setting themselves up "as defenders of moral standards" with a backing in "reactionary traditions".<sup>1</sup> In fact, women themselves pushed for the right to be able to carry arms and fight, arguing that "we women were even more oppressed than man and that we therefore had the right as well as the will and the strength to fight".<sup>2</sup> FRELIMO needed to launch an education campaign to increase the acceptance of female fighters in the population at large (Johnsen 1992:16). Ultimately this might have helped push the gender issue further.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the resistance of liberation armies to admitting women into combat, their leaders have all tended to advocate the image of heroic women fighters and have proudly advanced the myth that women's participation and role in the struggle equalled that of men. Writing in the early 1980s Helene Lebold took issue with the imagery of the "fighting woman" in Third World liberation movements exemplified by "posters with photos of young, smart women in uniform and with gun in hand" which suggested a numerically important contribution of fighting young women. These images seemed to "equalise armed struggle with individual female emancipation" (Lebold 1983:56). She suggests that despite the discourse of heroic women fighters in Algeria's independence struggle from France between 1954 and 1962, only 0.5 per cent of women in the army were combatants and that the tasks they predominantly performed gave them only limited decision-making powers in the movement (Lebold 1983:62).

In Southern Africa women acted heroically elevated metaphors of the liberation struggle too. In South Africa, for example, the image of the female fighter – the MK guerrilla – became a popular mass image of the strong, liberated women. Some women MK guerrillas also made it into township mythology as particularly brave and successful freedom fighters (Cock 1991:167). Winnie Mandela, the former wife of ANC President Nelson Mandela and named the "Mother of the Nation", has employed the imagery by appearing at public gatherings dressed in combat fatigues (even though she was never involved in military actions), creating powerful notions of a near mythical radical motherhood.

Little is known about the actual numbers of soldiers in Southern African liberation armies, let alone women combatants. Indications suggest that the numbers of women involved were relatively small and that those who were actually engaged in combat were even fewer. ZANLA is estimated to have had 7,500 female personnel in its refugee camps towards the end of the war, but only 1,500 to 2,000 of those were trained combatants. No information is available on how many of these combatants actually went into combat. The vast majority of women who were involved in the struggle were civilian activists assisting guerrillas in the war zones (Kesby 1996:564).

The ANC's armed wing, Umkontho we Sizwe (MK) saw a dramatic increase in numbers of female recruits from 1976 onward, a date marked by the Soweto

1. Central Committee report of the Third FRELIMO Congress, quoted in Iscacman Stephen 1980:25, footnote 63.
2. Member of the Women's Detachment quoted in Johnsen 1992:161.
3. Organisation of Mozambican Women (OMM), *Women of Mozambique*, Bergen, n.d., p. 7.

uprising against Bantu education which inspired many young students to take up arms in exile. By the end of the 1980s women constituted approximately 20 per cent of MK soldiers. But again, the areas of deployment of these women remain doubtful (Cock 1991:162). In Namibia women also joined the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) in larger numbers by the mid-seventies. Some women alternated between service at the front, in civilian camps, and receiving education (Becker 1995:149). But within PLAN, too, the number of women who actually fought at the front must have been very small. One ex-combatant has recalled that in the late 1970s "there were very few women at the front, perhaps 200. At the beginning they were sending hundreds of women but later they decided not to send so many because the situation at the front was really bad" (Shikola 1998:142).

Moreover, whatever the number of women soldiers, none of the liberation armies admitted women into higher command structures. Within MK only one woman ever managed to be appointed to military headquarters: Jacqueline Molefe was appointed chief of communications in 1983, because, in her own words "I was the longest serving person in the communication department" (Cock 1991:162). According to a former woman commander-in-chief:

In terms of the forward areas where you had the military mandate and structures, it is only as late as 1983 that we have begun to have women. But I can count them and I cannot reach five. I also know that in the two command structures I served in I was the only woman. There were women combatants at the lower levels, whereas in the command structures nothing.<sup>1</sup>

Joyce Mujuru, one of the women in the command structures of ZANLA, and later the Minister of Women's Affairs and Community Development in independent Zimbabwe, has suggested that the low educational level of women was a deterrent to their promotion in the army:

Those of us who had a bit of education, and I am one of those, were promoted even higher up than just being a commander. I was promoted to be a member of the national executive, and Mrs Mugabe was my deputy. And in the [military command structures] we also had a woman, you see. And in the training structures that is where we had a lot of women because they did not consider qualification in terms of education, because this was physical training and to some extent political training which needed somebody to be able to read and write.<sup>2</sup>

Educational gaps were, however, not the main reason why men were favoured over women. Men and women received the same or similar training in the liberation armies discussed here, and yet the majority of those engaged in auxiliary activities such as reconnaissance, moving of supplies and arms, nursing and telecommunications were women. This could not have been a sign of women's lack of military ability. According to Molefe MK women soldiers "really excelled in training" and they were stronger than men in keeping discipline and endurance (Cock 1991:163). Women were also considered good material for clandestine operations because they were able to blend into the environment and – at least initially – did not arouse the suspicions of the enemy. In MK women guerrillas

1. Interview, Cape Town, 19 May 1995.

2. Interview, Harare, 19 July 1995.

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became known as “knitting needle guerrillas”, because they were operating underground in reconnaissance, trying to look as ordinary as possible, carrying handbags in which knitting needles were visible (Cock 1991:151). In Zimbabwe women carried guns disguised as babies.

Women soldiers were like their civilian sisters also engaged in the mobilisation of the population. The leader of the Women’s Detachment of FRELIMO, Josina Machel, has explained that “it was easier for a female fighter to talk to other women and besides, their presence often shamed the more reluctant men to take more action” (Cock 1991). In Zimbabwe, too, the presence of women fighters became “one of the most important methods of mobilising. A man would say: “It’s impossible that a woman should fight. I must do the same.”<sup>1</sup> PLAN, ZANU and ZAPU also trained women as political commissars, utilising, as Soiri has pointed out, their reproductive capabilities, since “the commissar is the mother of the soldier”. The task of political commissars was “to uplift and maintain the morale of the soldiers and to explain the correct political orientation” (Soiri 1996:79).

A former commander in MK explained that “you found that when you finished training and you were immediately sent to some kind of security or administrative work. It was through pushing that some of us got deployed in forward areas to do the military work or inside the country. It was not automatic.”<sup>2</sup> That women were largely excluded from direct combat in MK was, according to Molefe, partly women’s own fault, because “there was no formal ruling excluding women from combat. It was our fault. We didn’t put enough pressure. We often protested that we were excluded from selection and it was always women who were chosen for the secretarial courses.”<sup>3</sup>

Gender stereotypical deployment patterns such as those discussed above would suggest that the gender equality so many combatants have felt during the struggle remained divided. For Thenjiwe Mtinso,<sup>4</sup> former commander in MK, “armies and war tend to be the monopoly of men” by definition. For her women were merely absorbed into a status quo: “You are made into a man. It is probably the type and form gender oppression takes that is different from day to day because of the structure of the army. It does not allow for differentiation.”<sup>5</sup> But in the end female soldiers in MK were “women” and male soldiers were simply “soldiers”.<sup>6</sup>

The recollections of former FRELIMO fighters are revealing in this respect. Even though female FRELIMO soldiers assumed men’s names (because there were only comrades of one gender – men) they never quite reached the front or got to fight. Mostly they were relegated to carrying the weapons that men used against the enemy:

1. Interview with an ex-combatant, quoted in Weiss 1986:80.
2. Interview, Cape Town, 19 March 1995.
3. Interview, Cape Town, 19 April 1995, and compare interviews in Cock:1991, 162, 166.
4. Mtinso was elected ANC MP after the 1994 elections, was then appointed to the position of head of the Commission for Gender Equality and has since 1998 been the Deputy Secretary General of the ANC.
5. Interview, Cape Town, 19 May 1995.
6. Thenjiwe Mtinso quoted in Lakha 1997:141.

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When women had almost got to where the fighting would take place they would be left at a certain spot, while the men went to fight, and on the way back they collected the women again. (Arthur 1998:73)

PLAN did not consider it appropriate to send women to the front, because “South African soldiers used to fire certain guns [...] once you fire them, even if you just finished your menstruation, you would start menstruating again automatically” (Shikola 1998:142). Try as they might, women could not escape the “curse” of their gender: in fact, the simple requirement women fighters had for sanitary napkins seemed to have caused supply problems both within ZANLA (Weiss 1986:90) and PLAN, where it was considered “the number one problem”.<sup>1</sup> The TPLF leadership also used menstruation as a justification for excluding women. The arguments, remembered by a woman fighter in Tirgay, are worth quoting:

We are poor. We often have to do without food. We have to travel fast. How can we provide such things as panties or pads for menstruation? Even if pads cannot be provided, there have to be clean clothes and this is not possible. If people are starving, how can an organisation provide pads, when we don't even have clothes to cover ourselves from the rain? (Druce and Hammond 1990:46)

Yet, gendered as the participation and deployment of women in liberation armies might have been, and whatever the initial reasons for participating, involvement in the armed struggle ultimately was perceived by women as “liberating”, also on a personal level. For Ropa Rinopfuka, talking part in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle helped her analyse the situation of women and to realise “that the oppression of women was not natural” but “part of the society we had inherited”.<sup>2</sup>

For Lucy, an ex-combatant with PLAN, gender inequality was not an issue in the army: “We were shoulder to shoulder [with men] otherwise you could die. You know, I find it so peaceful, me being among men, I find it so safe. I do not think of that gender thing. I know most of us are just equal.” She also gives men credit for sharing most work: “There was nothing like going and sitting in the shed, while we were doing the work”.<sup>3</sup> Ex-combatants with ZANLA have also spoken passionately about the respect they were given by men, and the fact that “there was no difference between men and women” even when it came to jobs traditionally done only by women like cooking and fetching water and firewood (Weiss 1986:90). A woman commander in PLAN enjoyed “commanding men who were older than I was. Who were more educated than I was. Far better than I was! But they would listen to me.”<sup>4</sup>

Some interpret the change of gender roles as equality<sup>5</sup>, others believe that men and women were far from being the same in the army:

It cannot be the same. And for sure it was not the same. But to tell you the truth, them being in the leadership and just having to consider women in leadership of some sort was really a good thing. [...] It was a challenge for women. If we would not have been given

1. Ellen Musialela quoted in Davis 1983:85.
2. Quoted in Bond-Steward 1987:48.
3. Interview, Windhoek, December 1998.
4. Interview quoted in Becker 1995:150.
5. Interviews, Harare, 16 and 18 February 1994.

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that, we would not have been able to prove ourselves. [...] It was like you are teaching a baby to walk. You have to help him, lift him and help him walk and then thereafter he can do it himself. That is exactly what we were given by our men.<sup>1</sup>

Jacklyn Cock has pointed out that “the nature of the struggle and the breakdown of normal male-female roles encouraged many women to discover new capacities within themselves” (Becker 1995:167), leading perhaps to the opening of “doors that would otherwise have taken decades to loosen” into “a world even they would not have dreamed of”.<sup>2</sup> Women realised that the struggle strengthened and hardened them, even if they did not have much education: “At home they would never have been given this chance.”<sup>3</sup>

### Changing gender relations in civilian populations

In rural areas, too, many women felt that liberation struggles, whilst they created severe hardships opened up opportunities to them that they would otherwise not have been able to obtain. Even though it was the women who actually left their rural environment to join the struggle in exile or in their liberation armies who experienced aspects of personal freedom most, those who stayed behind to cater for guerrilla forces also saw traditional structures change. Rural women have been reported to have had a head start on men because the latter “only heard about the guerrillas if they returned home for weekends or for the holidays” from their life as migrant labourers. Guerrillas tended to trust rural women more because they were less exposed to the colonial society (Weiss 1986:80).

Other aspects were, however, at work. More recently literature on the societal changes brought about by the independence struggle has started to question some of the mythical images of Zimbabwe's war (Bhebe and Ranger 1995; 1996). These accounts have looked in more detail at gender conflicts, either as a part of “the struggle within the struggle” (Kriger 1992) or as an attempt at explaining the inconsistency of the gender equality project in that country (Kesby 1996). A recent reinterpretation of the Mozambican liberation struggle has also pointed to gaps between official discourse and practice (Arthur 1998).

Norma Kriger's account of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle leaves little doubt about the coercion used by guerrillas and *mujibas*, young men recruited by the former to organise civilian supplies and support, and the loss of authority this implied for African rural élites. Within this environment of disempowered rural elders, young men and women followed their own specific agendas: “Women tried to improve their marital relations and *youth* [in her terminology including both young men and women] their social status and lack of autonomy. Women and youth protested through individual acts and women also appealed to the guerrillas to intervene on their behalf (Kriger 1992:209). Married women, for example, used the power guerrillas and *mujibas* had over older men when they sought their support against husbands who were drinking and beating their wives (Kriger 1992:194).

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1. Interview, Harare, 19 July 1995.  
 2. Joyce Mujuru, as Teurai Ropa, quoted in Johnsen 1992:166.  
 3. Ruvimbo Mujeni, quoted in *ibid*:161.

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Mike Kesby has presented us with a somewhat different version of the same struggles, in which young women in rural areas were able to use the erosion of parental authority by young guerrillas and *mujibas* on the one hand and the suppression of authority by colonial forces, such as happened in protected villages, to transgress traditional boundaries of behaviour. Even though young women were coerced into serving the domestic and sexual needs of guerrillas and *muji-bas* on the one hand and security personnel of the colonial state on the other, women were able to “frustrate parental control over the space of their bodies” and via their young but powerful lovers wield “unprecedented influence”. Sexual relationships with both colonial security personnel and guerrillas, even if entered into under duress, offered young women a “utilitarian advantage” to create – at least temporarily – “independent social and sexual interaction”. Moreover, even though the sexual division of labour remained relatively unquestioned, “the guerrillas’ reliance on peasant logistical support ensured that women and their domestic labour were projected to a level of explicit importance in society”. This meant that the mundane tasks associated with women were “translocated from the private sphere of the patriarchal home to the new, socialised space of guerrilla hideouts” (Kesby 1996:577 ff) and thus given new meaning and value.

But women could not always realise “utilitarian advantages” when traditional authority was questioned. In Namibia’s rural areas SWAPO and the churches replaced the moral authority of traditional leaders, many of whom had discredited themselves as collaborators with the colonial state (Tötemeier 1978:218). In this country, however, the void created by the erosion of parental authority was replaced by alcoholism coupled with a rise in sexual and domestic violence against women and a growing disrespect for them (Becker 1999). In this situation women had little to gain.

In Zimbabwe ZANU and ZAPU guerrillas supported women’s gender interests only occasionally and inconsistently, and the marriages without parental consent and *lobola* which ZANU arranged in liberated areas were considered only temporary. ZANU generally avoided “clashing with African custom and tradition” thus limiting its goal of “liberating women from the double burden of racism and tradition” (Kriger 1992:193). The OMA in Angola was critical of certain customary practices but also preferred to avoid open opposition in order not to provoke traditionalists (Wolfers and Bergerol 1983:126).

In Mozambique, Angola and Guinea Bissau the suspension of old practices had been pursued more consistently, leading to state orchestrated campaigns for the eradication of child marriage, *lobola*, polygamy, and initiation ceremonies. These practices were considered to create a sense of submissiveness in women, thus hampering their entry into productive labour.<sup>1</sup> Unlike in neighbouring countries where earlier nationalist movements had supported such practices as

1. ‘Second Conference of the Organisation of Mozambican women (OMM), Maputo 1977’, *Peoples Power* (London), 6, 1977.

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a reassertion of African identity against colonial penetration,<sup>1</sup> Machel believed that abandonment of “obsolete traditions does not affect our personality as Africans”.<sup>2</sup> FRELIMO and its women’s wing OMM accordingly discouraged these practices in liberated areas, sometimes with coercive methods. Younger women benefited from this policy (Urdang 1989:201 ff), but older women resented the FRELIMO ban on girls’ initiation ceremonies, because it deprived them of the basis of their authority over young women.<sup>3</sup>

In Guinea Bissau, PAIGC had also sought to discourage polygamy and forced marriages. To this end PAIGC “accepted into its ranks a large number of women who had left their villages and fled to the guerrilla bases in order to avoid a forced marriage or to leave their husband”. PAIGC also became directly involved in conflict resolution, at times even resorting to repaying *lobola* in order to free women from oppressive marriages (Urdang 1979:141 ff).

For many African women, their time as members of liberation armies and at times as civilian activists was a glimpse of the future, a “new type of living”, something both “wonderful and surprising”, exemplified by the fact that men and women, girls and boys lived together like relatives, “helping each other and sharing everything”, a friendship “like plants growing in fertile soil”.<sup>4</sup> Yet, even though the reality of the struggle meant a loosening of established gender roles in practice, this was not accompanied by an analysis of gender relations. In fact, some maintain with hindsight that existing gender relations were never questioned but simply suspended in the war situation.

The resistance to women’s participation in guerrilla armies, the limited admittance of women to the armed struggle as dictated by strategic interests, the tendency of allocating to women jobs that were most compatible with existing gender roles, the gendered nature of the tasks allocated to civilian activists, and the contradictory nature of guerrilla support for women’s strategic gender interests point to the salience of gendered divisions. Attempts at making women into honorary men on the frontline, calculated to avoid the acknowledgement of gender differences and gender roles and their (dangerous) reversal, remained spasmodic and inconsistent, precisely because such attempts did not cause men to seriously question gender relations.

Young rural Zimbabwean women, for example, were able to realise a “utilitarian advantage” during the years of the liberation war, but they also had to pay a high price. The independent “social and sexual interaction” which Kesby has identified as having empowered Zimbabwean women for a period of time, came at the price of coercion, and rape, and a lack of power to make choices. Kesby’s suggestion that women were used to being controlled and disciplined in the family, should not detract from the fact that many were forced into their new “freedom” and unable to confide in anyone. A Zimbabwean civilian activist has recalled with bitterness that:

1. Compare the case of the Mau Mau movement in Kenya, which strongly supported female circumcision, described earlier in this chapter.
2. Mozambique Information Office, *News Review*, 42, 1984, p. 3.
3. Signe Arnfred, ‘An Analysis of Female Initiation Rites in Mozambique’, unpublished paper, Roskilde n.d.
4. Zimbabwean women quoted in Johnsen 1992:164, 166.

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It was unfortunate that we had to sleep with comrades because sometimes we had sex with them. You could not even tell a friend about it, because it might be said that you were a prostitute or because the story would reach the freedom fighters and you would be in trouble. They always told us that we should never tell anyone. "We do not want sell-outs." ... Also if you had to sleep with one freedom fighter today, and another the next day, it was hard to tell who might be the father of the child.<sup>1</sup>

From military and civilian camps, too, stories of sexual abuse, coercion and gender inequality abound. In ZANLA camps leading comrades "felt it was their right to demand the services of women as a semi-servant or semi-wives at their base camp".<sup>2</sup> The problem, ex-combatant Margaret Dongo has explained, was that the girls singled out for sexual intercourse by commanders could not refuse "because there was nobody to complain to, they were all doing it".<sup>3</sup> SWAPO commanders were particularly interested in young girls fresh from home who were even more intimidated. Some commanders, writes Teckla Shikola, had "fifteen or eighteen kids" often by as many women (Shikola 1998:142). Some commanders were punished for rape,<sup>4</sup> but the majority of cases never came to the surface. For Shikola the problem was the structure of the army:

They train you in the army to say yes. Whenever someone in charge calls you, you should not refuse, you do not say no, you have to go. You feel scared of saying no, you cannot talk directly to the commander. (Shikola 1998:143)

Things seem to have worked out better at the front in combat situations. When men and women were fighting together in PLAN, sexual relationships were held to be out of the question. But this had less to do with respect for women and more to do with beliefs that sexual activity weakened men, making them more vulnerable to enemy attack: "Once you play sex, the belief was that you got killed. It is that understanding that you can sleep in the same trench with men because you are not supposed to do it (sex). Yes, there was a lot of discipline, because people were just thinking about their lives" (Shikola 1998). In ZANLA rumours circulated that sexual activities would stop guns from firing (Weiss 1986:94). Dangers of a slightly different sexual nature also raised the discipline in SWAPO reception centres and camps after 1988. Commanders were then scared of enemy agents in the guise of women who were alleged to have inserted certain substances into their vagina, which "cut" or "killed" men during sexual intercourse. The enemy was rumoured to have developed that strategy "because they knew that commanders were running after women who were coming out of the country".<sup>5</sup>

Dangers related to women's sexuality in PLAN were also at the root of the rule that women at the front were not allowed to cook. Far from indicating gender equality, the suspension of gender roles related to the dangerous influence women's menstruation could have on the fighters:

1. Juliet Makande, quoted in Irene Staunton 1990:49.
2. Joyce, a former ZANLA commander quoted by Weiss 1986:95.
3. Quoted in Spicer 1996.
4. Interview, Windhoek, 3 December 1998.
5. *Ibid.*

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We were not allowed to cook at the front but this is not a thing we should celebrate because the reason they did not allow us to cook was because they said that we were dirty because we menstruate. Honestly.<sup>1</sup>

FRELIMO maintained some sexual discipline between male and female soldiers by elevating women soldiers to men. On this basis sexual relations between fighters were forbidden, and some discipline could be maintained. Marriage between soldiers was also strictly prohibited until 1970. The rule that only men existed in the army did, however, not apply to commanders who reserved the right to order lower ranked women soldiers to have sex with them (Arthur 1998:69, 75 ff).

Control over women was also maintained in other ways. In SWAPO camps in Zambia, women suspected of having sexual relationships with Zambian men, were publicly humiliated by being dunked into a cold river at dawn and then being rolled about in sand: "The idea was that women who slept with other men would reveal secrets." Men, however, were allowed sexual contact with the women of the host country.<sup>2</sup>

Policies on contraception also offered control over women's sexuality. FRELIMO punished women who became pregnant, and expelled them from the military camp, at least for a period of time.<sup>3</sup> ZANU had prohibited sexual intercourse between male and female fighters but, seeing that the rule was broken, did not bring about enforced abstinence and negative sanctions (Weiss 1986:94). Julia Zvobgo, then an executive member of Women's Affairs, explained that, nonetheless, ZANU "did not go in for family planning. We did not restrict people's emotions" (Weiss 1986:94). Others have suggested that it was felt to be wrong to have birth control when so many people were dying<sup>4</sup> and others still have reported that women who became pregnant and had an abortion were beaten.<sup>5</sup>

In ZANLA pregnant women fighters were sent to a special camp for women and children: "At first they used to scream and refuse to go there, as they felt it was a place where wicked women were dumped", presumably because women anticipated disciplinary action (Bond-Steward 1987:34). It might also have been related to the fact that the mothers' camp, of course, represented a complete reversal of gender roles, given that its occupants were busy with activities prescribed by a very limited female reproductive role and women exchanged training in military skills for sewing classes and breastfeeding. But, still, for many women combatants the small liberties of camp life represented freedom: "We did not talk about *lobola*. If we were in love we felt free" (Weiss 1986:90).

Childcare arrangements in military and civilian camps certainly provided some freedom for young mothers. Talking about her eight months old son, Chipu, Teurai Ropa Nhongo (later Joyce Mujuru) explained in 1980 in an interview that he was a baby of the struggle who had been brought up by comrades

1. *Ibid.*
2. Interview, Windhoek, 3 December 1998.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Tainie, quoted in Weiss 1986:90.
5. Margaret Dongo quoted in Maria McCloy, 'Dongo Vs Flame', *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 1-15 May 1997.

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and thus did not “pine” for her. This she felt was very satisfactory. She was also enthusiastic that the “tradition of women only looking after babies was broken down” in that both men and women brought up *chimurenga* babies.<sup>1</sup>

SWAPO had many 24 hour kindergartens, one of the projects of the SWAPO Women’s Council, giving women with small children relative freedom to pursue other activities including camp administration and further education.<sup>2</sup> Women could leave their children over 3 years old in the care of those kindergartens for as many years as it took them to study: “You go off to study medicine and when you come back seven years later you find your child already at school.”<sup>3</sup> However liberating the act of being able to leave children and joining a cause must have been, it also caused major heartbreaks. Many women have not accepted that their children hardly know them and that they have missed out on the joys of parenthood. Yet, women across movements and countries have testified to joining the struggle precisely because they are mothers.

**The fruits of the struggle are not for women:  
Returning to “normal” life**

There is no doubt that the questioning of traditional authority and the (partial) changes of gender roles that occurred in nationalist movements and during liberation struggles in Africa changed the understanding and expectations of women to a much greater extent than they influenced men. It was, thus, not surprisingly women who during the independence struggles had developed behaviours that were not held to be acceptable and expectations that were not fulfilled. The reasons why women’s “liberation” was in most cases short-lived are debatable, but Kesby’s thesis that the “war-time ‘progress’ in the position of rural women was the contingent product of complex local struggles”, offers an explanation beyond Zimbabwe. What is important for him is notably the struggle over male identity and authority between rural elders and guerrillas, not between men and women. The loss of authority elders experienced during the struggle could be re-established after independence when guerrillas were demobilised, and traditional authority was able to re-assert itself both with ease and perhaps with a vengeance. The war-time behaviour of the rural women *chimbwidos* then came to be called what rural elders had believed all along but not dared say – prostitution (Kesby 1996). To some degree these modern day processes are reminiscent of the turn of the century when rural elders and urban young fought under the eye of colonial powers, which had unwittingly disempowered the former in favour of the latter, over the distribution of authority between them. Both sides used their control over women not as the object but the subject of this struggle, giving women opportunities of freedom which were again withdrawn when traditional authority patterns were re-established (Geisler 1992).

1. Interview, April 1980, quoted in Qunta, *Women in Southern Africa*, 1987:148, 149.

2. Interviews, Windhoek, November/December 1998.

3. Libertine Amathila, Member of the Cabinet in Namibia’s parliament since independence, one of the first trained African medical doctors in Namibia, and one time organiser of the largest SWAPO kindergarten in Angola, speaking in an interview with National Radio Australia, ‘Coming Out Show’, 16 March 1990.

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In early nationalist movements women left their social boundaries to a much lesser, or less noticeable degree, and like Foster Mubanga in Zambia, they were thankful to both their husbands and their leaders for being able to fill whatever role they were granted. But they also registered disappointment once independence was won. The famous TANU member Bibi Titi, for example, maintained that “the comradeship which existed between men and women during the struggle for independence ended after the power transfer”. Her experience, related by Ruth Meena, was that after independence women were supposed to hand over their public role and go back to their traditional roles as mothers and wives. Women were no longer needed to mobilise support for the struggle (Meena 1992a:47). Losa Lukande of Luapula Province in Zambia believed that she had fought for UNIP and for national independence “for nothing”. Eight years after independence she felt the national leaders she had hidden and supported had forgotten her: “I guess they thought I would fight for them while they would reap the rewards” (Poewe 1981:107).

Little changed when liberation movements adopted, at least rhetorically, agendas for women's emancipation. Working within the South West African National Union (SWANU) in an executive position during the struggle and after, Nora Chase, former Namibian ambassador to Germany, explains:

My experience with SWANU was that I was always in a leadership position when there was work to be done and a struggle to be led. But when the independence cake started to be cut up, we did not perform well enough in the elections and the men took the piece of the cake.<sup>1</sup>

Zimbabwean women, both the “mothers of the revolution” in the rural areas and the former members of ZANLA and ZIPRA, had experienced the disappointments of independence 10 years earlier. Meggi Zingani in Buhera in Zimbabwe's rural areas complained:

Some comrades fought the war and got themselves rewards... but some of us got nothing... We, who suffered, killed our chickens and goats, had children who died; we, mothers, who carried food on our heads to the guerrillas, while others hid in safety, now we see that they are the ones who are getting paid and we are getting nothing. It is most unfair. (Staunton 1990:135)

For former women combatants independence brought even greater hardships. Oppah Rusesha, later a member of the Zimbabwean parliament and cabinet, recalled the hostility with which female ex-combatants were met after the war:

I look at a situation, when we came back we were quite advanced in terms of emancipation. We were quite ahead of everybody else. We joined Zimbabwean women who were still cultured in approach when we came back. Everybody said: ‘Oh, these animals!’ They thought that we were crazy! Up until today they do not accept that. We started smoking, we started drinking, we started wearing pants, and to everybody it was: ‘Oh, that is not a woman!’ We were changed, had changed. Even our parents... we cannot communicate. So these Zimbabwean women now did not appreciate our own way of life and what emancipation meant, that women could qualify for positions and did not have to wait for men, that you could speak your mind. This was unheard of at the time.<sup>2</sup>

1. Interview, Windhoek, December 1998.

2. Interview, Harare, 16 February 1994.

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But it was not only other women who complained about the manners of ex-combatants in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. Many women ex-combatants have felt rejected by post-war society at large, because it had reverted to (or not changed from) old pre-war value systems. Because women had lived side by side with men, they were now labelled prostitutes: parents would not allow their “clean sons” to marry an ex-combatant girl, thinking that they would not make good wives.<sup>1</sup> These value judgements, of course, also hit young civilian women who, like the *chimbwidos* in rural areas, had acted as the “servants” of guerrillas.

In both cases it was women who were criticised, not men, who had encouraged and enforced many of the transgressions of women. Male ex-combatants managed to keep the halo of heroism longer than their sisters, even though many of them were also severely disadvantaged in the labour markets of independent Zimbabwe and Namibia, for example. Male guerrillas, too, seem to have changed their mind about their former sisters-in-arms away from the battlefield, preferring to marry “ordinary women” instead. To them, former comrades were comrades, not wives, even though they might have enjoyed that status unofficially once.

Moreover, many young women came back from the war with small children, often with different fathers, and with no education to help them into jobs. And the movement which once took care of the comrades’ needs was no longer there to help. Teckla Shikola has explained that the war situation created a particular lifestyle in SWAPO camps, where many women had a succession of relationships and children with men who then disappeared at the front:

... at the time the women did not feel that it was bad to have these children. You did not feel it until you got back home This was when you realised this was bad. But when you are in that situation, you don’t feel it, you experience it as normal, it was just how it was in the war. They realised when they got back. During the war, SWAPO was taking care of all the kids. The women received clothing, food, everything was there... So, during the war, the women did not really feel the absence of husbands because they had no responsibilities, they did not have to provide anything for the kids. (Shikola 1998:144)

Ellen Ndeshi Namhila also felt that loss of support on her return to Namibia from exile:

It is hard for me to believe that the unity we had in exile was purely pretence. I think people really cared for each other...Repatriation marked an end to this caring. Gone is the community spirit which held us together as one people, despite our different cultural backgrounds. (Namhila 1997:193)

If this decline of solidarity back in a country where everybody had to fight for a place in society affected both men and women, women were possibly worse off, finding themselves with small children, no job, and an environment unwilling to accept their different lifestyle and thinking. Men were happy to readjust to old privileges and to once more claim them, women were faced with a situation where they had to forgo the personal freedom they had had a taste of. For many women, particularly if they had joined the struggle as young teenagers and had

1. ‘Women Ex-Combatants’, *Moto* (Gweru), March 1983.

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grown up in the movement, experiencing the realities of the country they had sacrificed their youth for was sobering and bitterly disappointing.

But it was not only on the level of personal freedom that women were pushed back into an existence of obscure dependency and muteness, the silence also showed itself in terms of political representation. Participation in the struggle did not qualify women for a part in the decision-making structures of the society they had fought for. With the exception of South Africa, women found themselves excluded from parliaments and cabinets, even when they actively sought to achieve a different outcome. Just after independence in 1990 women's activist Nora Chase complained that Namibia's women were nowhere:

In the struggle women played their full part, at all levels and at all times. And we constantly reminded ourselves that having participated in the liberation struggle women in Namibia will not make the mistake that was made for example by the women of Algeria, that you take part in the liberation struggle on an equal basis, and when the fruits of that struggle are enjoyed you are on the outside...If we are realistic at this point except that we do not close our faces with a scarf, we might not be better off than our Algerian sisters at that point in their liberation struggle.<sup>1</sup>

In the following chapters we look at the outcomes of nationalist movements and liberation struggles for women, and we examine the exceptionality of South Africa, where women managed to make substantial gains in the transition to majority rule.

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1. Quoted in 'Coming out Show' National Australian Radio, 16 March 1990.

## CHAPTER 3

Asserting Women's Liberation within  
National Liberation*The Case of the South African Women's Movement*

Even though women entered early nationalist movements with a hope of liberating their country and also themselves, nationalist leaders failed to acknowledge women's oppression not only under colonialism but also under patriarchy. The leaders of Marxist liberation struggles recognised the need for the emancipation of women, but saw that need as satisfied within national liberation. This meant that women's specific gender interests were not recognised in post-independence politics, and that patriarchal value systems reasserted themselves even in cases where the conditions of the struggle had started to question them.

In rural Zimbabwe women's liberation came to be heard of only after independence had been won,<sup>1</sup> and discourses within SWAPO never questioned existing gender roles during the liberation struggle. In South African liberation movements, the official discourse was no different until the 1980s, when women were able to assert themselves and their specific needs within the ANC to such effect that in 1990 the ANC leadership officially acknowledged women's emancipation as an autonomous aspect of national liberation. The statement of the ANC National Executive Committee which established this recognition, clearly stated that

... the experience of other societies has shown that the emancipation of women is not a by-product of national liberation or socialism. It needs to be addressed in its own right within our organisation, the mass democratic movement and in society as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

This statement opened up considerable political space for women in the transition period towards majority rule in the early 1990s and it encouraged exceptional policy outcomes. Most notable and visible among them was the large number of women who entered parliament in 1994 on an ANC ticket. According to Frene Ginwala, one of the most prominent gender activists in the ANC leadership in exile, who has held the position of Speaker of the South African Parliament since 1994, this for Southern Africa unique result "did not happen out of nothing ... it is a process". Gender policy had become the concern of the party rather than just its women members, so that "it is not as if you have a pol-

1. Themba Khumalo quoted in Staunton 1990: 81.

2. 'Statement of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress on the Emancipation of Women in South Africa', 2 May 1990, quoted in Walker 1991:xv.

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icy which is divorced from the MPs here. The MPs have been part of making that policy.”<sup>1</sup>

The key to the success of South African women is often interpreted as having been based in the exceptional history of mass women's movements and what Jenny Schreiner, former ANC MP and member of the South African Communist Party (SACP), has called “real hard struggle”:

When women have played the kind of role they have played in the trade unions from the 40s, in the Communist Party from the day it started, throughout the 50s, in a real mass way – you cannot ignore it! You cannot point to your head and say that women are second rate. I think, as you live together in one organisation you start to value each person for their contribution.<sup>2</sup>

Ruth Mompati, a former ANC MP, and in the 1980s one of three women on the ANC executive in exile, also suggested similarly:

As we fight side by side with our men in the struggle, men become dependent on us working with them. They begin to lose sight of the fact that we are women. And there is no way that after independence these men can turn around and say: ‘But now you are a woman.’<sup>3</sup>

But Mompati and others had only a few years earlier suggested that talking about women's emancipation was divisive in that it detracted from nationalistic aims. In 1980 a delegation of the ANC Women's Section, Mompati amongst them, had delivered a paper to the UN Women's Conference in Copenhagen stating that “the common exploitation and oppression of men and women on the basis of colour has led to a combined fight against the system instead of a battle against men for ‘women's rights’”.<sup>4</sup> In an interview in Copenhagen at the time Mompati had asked how South African women could talk about equality when “we are not yet recognised as human beings?” and she expressed disappointment with Western feminists who insisted on the primacy of the struggle against patriarchy and in turn considered talk about political struggle at a woman's conference divisive and reactionary.<sup>5</sup> Yet, in the decade that followed the conference the issue of women's emancipation was brought up with the ANC leadership with greater urgency, because, suggested Mompati, “if we continue to shy away from this problem, we will not be able to solve it after independence”.

In a more radical tone, suggestive of the ANC policy statement four years later, Ginwala had in 1986 already declared that the dismantling of the apartheid state would not “automatically mean that women are adequately represented at decision making levels, or that women's rights are fully achieved”. During the struggle, she hoped, the foundations of women's emancipation and the removal of institutional problems could perhaps be laid, while the problems related to “the attitudes of men of all races” were a major task ahead which

1. Interview, Cape Town, 22 May 1995.

2. Interview, Cape Town, 18 March 1996.

3. Ruth Mompati, quoted by Russell 1989:116.

4. ‘The Role of Women in the Struggle against Apartheid, 1980. Paper prepared by the Secretariat for the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women’, Copenhagen, July 1980.

5. Interview with Ruth Mompati, in International Feminist Collective, *Sammen er vi stærke – indtryk for den alternative kvindekongress 1980*, Copenhagen 1981:123 ff.

would have to be tackled long after majority rule had been gained (Ginwala 1986:14).

### Women's involvement in political struggles until the 1960s

South African women had been involved in the struggle against apartheid policies since the early part of the century, when they took up the protest against pass laws in the Orange Free State in 1913. Women waged this struggle again all over South Africa in the 1950s, when passes were once more imposed on them, heightening their militancy and determination.

From 1918 onwards African women were organised in the ANC's Bantu Women's League, but their auxiliary membership denied them voting rights and autonomy, until in 1943 they were granted full membership in the ANC, a date that coincided with the formation of the ANC Women's League.<sup>1</sup> In Francis Baard's recollection "it was a big thing for us to organise the women like that", and wearing the ANCWL uniforms to meetings filled them with pride. But she has also recalled that many husbands were not happy with their wives' staying away from home and made it difficult for women to attend meetings. The ANCWL was, however, not an independent body but was under the direction of the ANC and its members "were part of the ANC as a whole" (Baard 1986:33 ff). The auxiliary nature of women's involvement was idealised as "inculcating children with nationalist aspirations and agitating against oppression as it manifested itself in the specific areas of child rearing" (Kimble and Unterhalter 1982:22). Throughout the 1940s the work of the League was limited to conventional 'women's work' such as fund-raising and catering (Walker 1982:90).

Motherist ideals also dominated women's participation in the defiance campaigns of civil disobedience in the 1950s particularly against the pass laws. Women's resistance to the pass laws carried with it much greater urgency than for men. The need to carry passes restricted them to "work within their own households or in informal sector activities instead of entering wage labour" (Walker 1982:90), because the passes effectively barred them from urban areas and confined them to African reserves. In urban areas, in particular, "we are very close to a matriarchal society, with the struggle to keep the family going resting mainly on the women and trying to stop husbands from going off the rails".<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, men's objections to the need for women to carry the passes "related to their interference with a man's authority over his wife", and men felt that their women's defiance was "far more radical than [they] would have found necessary" (Wells 1993:133) surprising them "with how strong they were" (Baard 1986:38).

Moreover, women felt that they needed to organise the campaign in a separate organisation from men, more independent, and broader based than the ANCWL could be. The formation of the Federation of South African Women

1. For a detailed history of women's early involvement in the ANC see Frene Ginwala, 'Women and the African National Congress, 1912-1943', *Agenda*, 8, 1990.  
2. George Bizos, quoted in Lipman 1984:74.

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(FSAW) in 1954 which united ANC women with other South African women's organisations, including those of White and Indian women, signalled "the women's sense that the existing, male dominated political organisations were unlikely to meet their needs as women" (Wells 1993:133).

Those needs were certainly identified as being centred around women's domestic role, and it was the notion of motherhood that was widely used by the FSAW leadership to recruit women. Lilian Ngoyi, the first president of the FSAW, called on women to be at the forefront of the struggle in order to secure a better future for their children, because "they had a duty to protect their offspring".<sup>1</sup> And Helen Joseph has recalled that for the membership of the Federation "the stress was on the struggle for liberation of men and women together". She has suggested that "separationist feminist liberation" was not the focus of the movement's activities (Joseph 1993:45).

But even though anti-pass protests were not overtly questioning patriarchal values that located women in the home, they propelled women out of the domestic into a highly politicised public sphere. In fact, "the status that women gained for themselves was granted – ironically – by the wide police action they provoked" with police "doing them the honour of treating them as ruthlessly as they would have done men" (Gordimer 1993). Thus women left their homes and children for episodes or a lifetime of political struggle and imprisonment precisely in order to protect their homes and children. Commentators have noted that the apparent "ease with which women discarded their expected subordinate role came as a shock to many of the men and even to some of the women" (Schmidt 1983:1).

Moreover, the Women's Charter endorsed by the 146 delegates representing a membership of 230,000 at the first FSAW National Conference was "a remarkably progressive document, far in advance of popular thinking about women and their place in society at that time" (Walker 1982:160). It claimed full gender equality stating that the laws and customs that hinder women's progress hinder the whole nation. It blamed men "for the refusal ... to concede to us women the rights and privileges which they demand for themselves" and warned that they "will not be able to liberate themselves without extending equal rights to women".<sup>2</sup>

The high point of FSAW actions until 1960, when the banning of the ANC all but paralysed its operations, was the 1956 demonstration against the pass laws which gathered 20,000 women at the Union Buildings in Pretoria. The event was a powerful show of women's political maturity and solidarity that has since 1986 been commemorated as South Africa's Women's Day. Signs of men's recognition of women's political achievements followed the 1956 demonstration. In 1958 the ANC NEC issued Certificates of Merit to the women imprisoned during the anti-pass campaigns, a gesture much valued by Maggie Resha to whom it was "the most precious document ... because none of us expected such an honour" (Resha 1991:133).

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1. Lilian Ngoyi remembered by Resha 1991:48.

2. *Women's Charter*. Adopted at the Founding Conference of the Federation of South African Women. Johannesburg, 17 April 1954.

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Other rather paternalistic applause of African men for women's achievements had been forthcoming at the ANC Annual Conference three years earlier when the ANCWL was praised for having made its mark as "not just being an auxiliary of the African National Congress", and the statement that the struggle could not be won without the participation of the women.<sup>1</sup> But these were small concessions, which did not result in direct support from men, nor was there any direct effort to integrate women's concerns into the campaigns. If men were eager, it was to credit their effectiveness for themselves (Wells 1993:133).

Despite its short life span the FSAW "broke new ground amongst women in South Africa". Its greatest departure from the past was that it was a women's organisation that was not conceived of as an auxiliary to a male-dominated body, such as other women's organisations were at the time. The FSAW was thus able to represent "a real and serious attempt to incorporate women into the political programme of the national liberation movement on an equal footing with men" (Walker 1982:275–276).

The motherist approach, which has been interpreted as a form of South African feminism that brought women together and led to mobilisation around women's issues (Hassim and Gouws 1988:65), has, however, been criticised as having been essentially conservative and disempowering because while "some of women's legitimate concerns are identified as their *sole* concerns... responsibility for the 'crisis of the family' is placed ultimately *on the women themselves*" (Hassim 1991:77). Since women were drawn into African nationalism as mothers of the nation they were given "a special and revered place but it also allowed for the continued subordination to the broader nationalist project" (Meintjes 1998:69).

Despite these shortcomings, which were no doubt conditioned by the limitations set by society in the historical period in which they occurred, FSAW was unique in Southern Africa, and the statements and demands it gave rise to were nothing short of revolutionary at the time, not only in Africa. Ultimately the experience laid the basis for the broad based mass women's movements affiliated to the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the 1980s and the Women's National Coalition (WNC) in the early 1990s.

### Women's movements in the 1970s and 1980s

The political repression of the 1960s, which sent liberation movements underground or into exile, left a hole in political activism and the women's movement until the radical Black Consciousness (BC) movement, composed initially mainly of students, gathered momentum in the 1970s. With an approach that saw race and class as the main dividing line in South African society, "gender as a political issue was not raised at all". Instead women entered the movement as black people (Ramphele 1992:215) and under a "womanist" banner which advocated motherhood to be directed towards the fulfilment of black people's aspirations (Lewis 1992:44). The rallying cry of BC "black man you are on your own" clearly attested to the fact that

1. National Executive of the African National Congress quoted in Schmidt 1983:2.

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The black man equals the black. Put differently, any understanding of discrimination against black women was explained in terms of their blackness, and not as black female subjects; they were black women. (Ratele 1998:60)

The Black Women's Federation (BWF), a national umbrella body launched in 1975 under the auspices of BC and banned two years later was mainly concerned with mobilising women against racial discrimination (Ratele 1998:216) and with addressing women's practical needs. According to Mamphela Ramphele, then a prominent member of BC:

There is no evidence to suggest that the BWF was concerned with the special problems women experienced as a result of sexism both in the private and the public sphere. Women were important as wives, mothers, girlfriends and sisters, in fighting a common struggle against a common enemy – namely white racism. Scant regard was given to their position as individuals in their own right. (Ramphele 1992:216)

Cheryl Carolus, then also a member of BC, has recalled that “black men felt that asserting their blackness meant asserting their maleness” towards women also via sexual harassment such as forcing women “into sex when they were not ready for it”.<sup>1</sup> Many BC women themselves were reluctant to let go of established gender roles, so that interpersonal relationships remained largely unchanged “with the man as the dominant partner, and many women remaining trapped in unsatisfactory relationships that violated their dignity as people” (Ramphele 1992:220). The comrades generally “took a dim view” of women challenging gender stereotypes, which tended to make them unpopular, both with men and women.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, Ramphele and other former women members who grew into strong feminists a decade later have maintained that the movement gave them new confidence in themselves. But even then

... there were no real continuities because ... there wasn't really a theoretical understanding of gender equity or inequity. It was all a question of experiencing things and interpreting them as best as we could.<sup>3</sup>

Being initiated into activist circles meant being forced to become “one of the boys”, including late nights, alcohol consumption and smoking, a lifestyle that was generally not accepted in women by the comrades. As “honorary men” many young women learned to be assertive and tough “to the point of arrogance”, striving to prove that they “were as good as any man in as far as that was biologically possible” (Ramphele 1992:219). These virtues or vices stood them in good stead in later gender activism.

If the racially segregated BWF did not manage to survive for long in the political climate of the 1970s, regional multiracial women's organisations that emerged through the 1980s managed to establish themselves better. Yet, commentators have observed that the profile of women activists never quite reached the level of the 1950s. For Jeremy Seekings few of the struggles and protests women participated in were specific women's protests, but were instead more

1. Quoted in McGregor 1998:17.

2. Mamphela Ramphele interviewed by Yates and Gqola 1998:90 ff.

3. Mamphela Ramphele interviewed by Yates and Gqola 1998:94.

general civic protest movements led by men. In addition, women were often prominent supporters of what he calls “conservative township leaders”, who generally espoused particularly patriarchal and non-egalitarian ideologies. Later on, leaders of the youth politics of the mid-eighties “scoffed at the idea of women participating in fighting or strategic planning and dismissively said that women’s role was to attend to food and look after the kids” (Seekings 1991:78–79, 82).

Others have observed that even though large numbers of women were mobilised for specific events they “have never been able to remain involved in large numbers in a sustained way in building their organisations”. Women’s organisations were therefore led by a few committed women while the masses of women remained outside and unorganised.<sup>1</sup> According to Seekings women’s lack of active and sustained participation might have been due to the restrictions imposed by husbands. They created a situation where women “had to battle with husbands against being kept back from the struggle” with men wanting their wives not to “move at all. Only to go to church and market.”<sup>2</sup> None of these factors are, however, able to explain why such constraints did not keep women back in the 1950s.

Many women’s organisations affiliated to the United Democratic Front (UDF) which was formed in 1983. It brought together close to 400 anti-apartheid organisations and functioned effectively as the internal wing of the ANC. According to a former member these organisations represented “a real working-class mass based movement”.<sup>3</sup> Albertina Sisulu, a founding member of FSAW became the co-president of UDF and even though she was one of the very few women on the executive, the organisation had, according to Sisulu, many strong women leaders in its affiliated groups (Russell 1986:145).

During the height of the BC movement in the seventies, feminism had made headlines in Europe and America, but it had made little impact on BC rank and file. Ramphele has commented that, “the feminist movement was dismissed as a ‘bra-burning’ indulgence of bored, rich white Americans” (Ramphele 1992). She and Carolus were inspired by feminist ideas later in the 1980s. By then women’s organisations within South Africa had begun not only to discuss non-racialism but also feminism. A former UDF member explained:

There was real debate about feminism, feminist issues, the left perspective on gender and whether that was feminism or not feminism, and how to categorise feminism. Those were debates that were alive in the leadership of those organisations. ... All the non-racial organisations in South Africa in the 1980s had a damn difficult job and you needed to manage it in a very careful manner, you needed to constantly be putting it on the agenda. In addition, the balance between working class women and intellectual, professional middle-class women was also something that we balanced. It was a difficult balance, there were tensions, not tensions that could split organisations, but the leadership of those organisations needed actually to handle it, manage it, deal with it in a political way.

1. Marie, ‘Women Face the Challenge’, *Agenda* 1, 1987, p. 12; ‘Organising Women’, *Work in Progress* 21, 1982, p. 19.
2. OK Bazaar strikers interviewed by *Speak* and quoted by *Work in Progress*, p. 12.
3. Interview, Cape Town, 18 March 1996.

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You had really powerful women who came from three communities, Indian, Coloured and White. They have played a very important role in the ideological development of organisations as well as in the organisational development, because the organisational principles that were established in the eighties were also profoundly important. They were democratically structured. [...] There was a whole discussion about: Do we form organisations or a federation? And that was a long, painful and at times extremely acrimonious debate. All those organisational debates had been systematically worked through ... And what is the most appropriate structure to link them together... And we established principles of leadership accountability to the branch membership.<sup>1</sup>

In one of the three largest regional women's organisations at the time, the United Women's Organisation (UWO) in the Western Cape prominent members came from the old FSAW, but it was dominated by younger women, Carolus amongst them. UWO operated on the basis of individual membership to open up for progressive women's voices, and it discussed branch organisation carefully, trying to avoid the replication of racially exclusive neighbourhoods (Meintjes 1998:73–74). Sexism was also discussed, but former member Elaine Salo has remembered that

... there was a constant tension between spending time on gender consciousness raising, such as talking about our experiences in relationships with men or about sexual assaults against women, and meeting the needs of national struggle, such as the occupation of white beaches or the protest against detentions. (Kemp et al. 1995:140)

Gertrude Fester, another former member, has suggested that gender issues were always subordinated to class issues in UDF meetings and that there was “an awareness on the part of some male comrades, but the theory and the practice do not always coincide. And when one looks at the personal lives of some comrades, they also leave much to be desired” (Russell 1989:253). UWO members complained about being asked by male UDF members to serve tea at UDF meetings, because “we regarded it as a reinforcement of the stereotypes of women as providers”. In fact, the UWO constitution spelled out that “we have got to learn to share housework now” (Kemp et al. 1995:140).

Anne Mayne, a white member of the Cape based Rape Crisis, was an ardent member of the UDF for only a short time because

... after the initial excitement of hearing so many articulate black people speaking, I became increasingly bothered by the sexism in the organisation. The men were usually the organisers and the speakers at the meetings. I became sick and tired of the fact that I never saw a woman on the platform, except for Cheryl Carolus... Some of the UDF women in my area had husbands or lovers who were talking about women's rights and feminism, but they did not really *understand* it. (Russell 1989:238)

Gertrud Fester, therefore, explained in an interview in the 1980s that “it was important to organise as women now because we don't want to have a new society where we are still second-class citizens. We mustn't wait for a revolution to organise women.” She also quoted younger women as being critical towards “motherism”, suggesting that “the mother image had to be toned down a bit” because not all women were mothers or planned to become one (Russell 1989:249, 342). Young women students remained in limbo because student pol-

1. Interview Cape Town, 18 March 1996.

itics disregarded women's concerns, while women's organisations had programmes "geared for the older community women" which did not "cater for a constituency of young women, who were arguably not triply oppressed, or in fact mothers of youth, but youth themselves" (Nkomo 1991:12).

But serious debates about how to raise gender issues within UDF also took place, with the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW), for example, raising awareness about women's oppression through the 1980s, even if such issues were addressed very carefully with the membership (Kemp et al. 1995:140). Organisations had to weigh raising gender concerns against the aim of mobilising women and being a mass movement, since many women shied away from overtly feminist and political messages.

In Natal, NOW had powerful competition in the women's wing of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the Inkatha Women's Brigade (IWB), which had resisted affiliation to the UDF and represented values opposed to those embraced by NOW. Inkatha based its very hierarchical and authoritarian structure on the model of a 'traditional family', leaving a subordinate role to the IWB embedded in a top-down approach of organising women. This "narrow conservatism" defined women as "mothers of the nation" who had an obligation to be "strong for the sake of your children, your fathers, your mothers and your husbands" and for the sake of the nation and Africa.<sup>1</sup> This identity denied women space to redefine their political role and channelled their energies away from progressive women's organisations, such as NOW represented (Beall, Hassim and Todes 1989:39). The Women's Brigade mobilised women on the basis of interests such as sewing rather than political activism, and it obviously had much greater success with that strategy than NOW had with its direct and immediate political thrust. NOW thus only enjoyed a fraction of the membership the IWB achieved, and its constituency was far more limited. In 1986 NOW had 1,000 members as against almost 393,000 members signed up with the IWB (Hassim 1991:74, 81).

Women's organisations in the 1980s thus had to negotiate the raising of strategic gender needs both with the male leadership of the UDF, with women who were embedded in more conservative or localised concerns, and with the repressive state. They chose to mobilise women on the basis of practical gender needs hoping that they could eventually be used as the basis for demands of a more strategic nature which then in turn could be carried into the UDF (Hassim and Gouws 1988:62). The transition from practical to strategic demands did, however, not always take place and there were "instances where projects have remained simply sewing and knitting clubs" (Patel 1987:33) even in the ambit of the UDF.

According to one commentator the politicisation of gender came to be a "tricky issue":

The divide was – do we present ourselves as a kind of sewing group to which all women can belong and feel comfortable, and slowly 'conscientise' (sic), or do we present ourselves

1. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, president of Inkatha in 1985, quoted by Hassim 1987.

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as an overtly political force, which means that a lot of women would be too intimidated to join? These debates were extensive.<sup>1</sup>

For Kemp et al. the rejection of feminism in many women's organisations at the time was thus not based on a lack of consciousness but on the fact that "strategic decisions had to be made about how and when they could make gender issues public given the real threat of a genocidal state to their very lives" (Kemp et al. 1995:143). This was, presumably, also the motivation behind ANC women's claim that "it would be suicide to adopt feminist ideas" (Cock 1997:321). Critics later claimed with hindsight that the women's organisations of the 1980s clearly had "been too busy taking up general community struggles" and that

... we as women need to clarify what we want in a new society. We need to clarify what the specific issues are that confront us, apart from issues in relation to our children, our rents and livelihoods. We need to talk as women about how we feel about being raped, about being grabbed by men, even men comrades at a trade union rally, about how so many of us get beaten up by the men we live with...<sup>2</sup>

What moved strategy considerations along was the acute awareness of the fate of women in earlier liberation movements, particularly in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Several lessons were drawn from the analysis of these failures. The main conclusion was that participation in national liberation had been no guarantee for women's concerns to be addressed in newly independent states. The integration of women into the workforce alone was obviously not sufficient to ensure the transformation of patriarchal structures, institutions and practices (Horn 1991:20). More significant, perhaps, was the realisation that the transformation of society towards gender equality required the acknowledgement of the need for gender struggles.

In 1989 Beall et al. observed that while the 'women's question' pointed to the coherence between women's demands and the national struggle, the gendered content of women's demands, based on a thorough gender analysis, which would have linked it to patriarchy and the necessity to conduct gender struggles, were ignored (Beall et al. 1989:38–39). The concept of "the triple oppression of women", while it captured the interrelationship between race, class and gender, treated the three identities as additive, "a way of identifying a political constituency rather than a means of understanding the specificity of women's oppression in South Africa" (Hassim 1991:68). As long as the existence of a gender struggle was denied, as had happened in Mozambique under the leadership of Machel, women's demands could be brushed aside as bourgeois and divisive, precluding the building of autonomous women's movements (Charman et al. 1991:57). Underlying the analysis was the realisation that

... the militance (sic) of mass-based feminist organisation is an essential requirement for both challenging patriarchy and achieving and maintaining government expenditure in the area of practical gender interests, whether there is a progressive or a conservative government in place. (Horn 1991a:20)

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1. Personal information, September 1999.

2. Marie, 'Women Face the Challenge', *Agenda* 1, 1987, p. 73.

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For Pat Horn, a union organiser and gender activist, this meant that South African women should stop worrying about being labelled feminists and work out “what progressive feminism means in practice in the present day South African context”:

Our fear of creating divisions in the national liberation struggle has led to the development of a woman’s movement which is afraid of seriously challenging patriarchal domination. This timidity comes through in the general avoidance within the mass women’s movement of strategic gender interests. The political situation today requires a more assertive level of women’s organisation, to guide the ANC and other progressive organisations in a more gender conscious struggle for a new democratic South Africa. (Horn 1991a:37)

In her opinion an assertive women’s movement whose members fought for the end of patriarchal oppression of all women in society could surely not be divisive but represented on the contrary an essential asset to the liberation struggle.

When Horn wrote this in 1991 a number of events had taken place, particularly the un-banning of the ANC and other liberation movements, and the prospects of majority rule had effectively changed the armed struggle for national liberation into a struggle for representation. By then, too, the ANC leadership had acknowledged the autonomy of women’s emancipation and the ANC Women’s League had reconstituted itself inside South Africa again. It was the prospect of this event that had led to a discussion of strategy, and the affirmation that an independent women’s movement was essential in order to avoid the mistakes of neighbouring countries, where women had been subsumed under political parties and governments.

#### Returning home:

##### *Gender politics in the transition period*

The ANC Women’s League had in exile reconstituted itself as a Women’s Section of the ANC, tied even closer to the party’s aims than had been the case before it was banned. Women were, as outlined in Chapter 2, also drawn into the armed wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), particularly after the 1976 Soweto Uprising against the Bantu Education Act. Yet, within the executive of the ANC women were almost absent, with never more than 3 women being represented in the NEC. A group of dedicated women had nonetheless started to address gender issues, particularly the relationship between women’s emancipation and national liberation and the lack of women in the ANC leadership, with increasing vehemence through the 1980s. The UN Decade of Women and life in exile, with its exposure to “different models of domestic politics” might have helped matters along (Ramphela 1982:223). Mavivi Manzini, who was based in Zambia at the time, suggested gender equality practice was:

Better outside than here ... maybe because of the various tasks we do here. Sometimes we travel and our husbands have to remain at home. And in some places we have to travel communally and we all have to cook, wash and clean the house. We women also go to the office in the morning and come back tired, so most of the men here are accepting more equality. (Russell 1989:130)

Frene Ginwala had most importantly been influenced by the fact that “the ANC was putting forward advanced positions on women but that these were not be-

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ing implemented" (Russell 1989:22). Indeed, as early as in 1981, Oliver Tambo, the president of the ANC in exile, had acknowledged gender oppression amongst the ANC's own rank and file when he called on the Women's Section to "liberate us men from antique concepts and attitudes about the place and the role of women in society". He also stated that women in the ANC had hardly the same opportunities as men and that the "capacity of the women to contribute fully in the liberation struggle depends, in part, on what we in practice conceive to be their role as women".<sup>1</sup> But the "adoption of such policies owed more to the persuasive advocacy of some women members than to the level of understanding of either the membership or entire leadership" (Ginwala 1991:69).

Demands of the ANC women included more equitable participation of women in decision making structures of the ANC NEC in exile as well as in the UDF leadership structures, and the establishment of a structure within the ANC proper to promote gender equality. This culminated in an "agreement in principle" with the ANC in exile over a 30 per cent quota for women in ANC structures and the establishment of an ANC Commission on the Emancipation of Women. The latter was to ensure that the ANC, men and women, took the responsibility for the implementation of the ANC gender equality policy, rather than delegating this task to the women in the ANC, that is to the Women's Section.

The commission was finally established in 1992 in an attempt to take gender into the ANC proper and to create responsibilities for gender policies in the ANC leadership. Thus the commissioners, both men and women, were not responsible to the ANC Women's League but they were accountable directly to the NEC. Ginwala, its deputy head, has credited it with helping create a situation where the ANC developed a gender policy that was mainstreamed throughout the ANC and that therefore you could "challenge any ANC policy on the basis that it has not integrated the concerns of women".<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the ANC Women's Section and other women members of the ANC ensured that the ANC's constitutional guidelines of 1989 addressed, even though inadequately, gender equality. The constitutional committee of the ANC included only one woman among 19 men (Ginwala 1991:69), causing ANC women to mount pressure on the ANC leadership. A four day meeting of the Constitutional Committee with the Women's Section apparently resulted in a revision of the preamble to the guidelines, which committed a future ANC government to paying "special attention... to combating sexism, which is even more ancient and as pervasive as racism".<sup>3</sup> Many of the demands of the 'feminists' in the ANC, however, were not met. Amongst them was the demand that laws, customs and traditions that discriminated against women should be held to be unconstitutional. Proposals meant to open the way for a recognition of women's reproductive rights and a strengthening of their status in family law also fell on deaf ears (Driver 1991:89).

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1. Oliver Tambo, Speech at the Concluding Session of the Conference of the Women's Section of the ANC, Luanda, Angola. September 14, 1981.
  2. Interview with Frene Ginwala, Cape Town, 22 May 1995.
  3. An extensive discussion of the constitutional guidelines is presented by Driver 1991:82-102.

The constitutional guidelines included, however, reference to a “charter of gender rights” to be incorporated into the constitution. The idea of this charter had been discussed as a strategy in the months following the un-banning of the liberation movements and preceding the reconstitution of the ANC Women’s League within South Africa in 1990, particularly at the Malibongwe Conference in Amsterdam. This was organised by the ANC Women’s Section and the Dutch Anti-Apartheid movement and was the largest of a number of meetings that brought women from a range of UDF affiliated organisations within South Africa and from exile together. The conference resolutions stated that gender is a political issue that must be addressed as an autonomous aspect of national liberation. In her conference contribution Ginwala clearly expostulated that the “ANC would not be true to its principles and values if it did not now seriously address the question of the emancipation of women” (Ginwala 1990a).

The right of women to participate fully and on the basis of equality in decision making at all levels was deemed of paramount importance in this process. The conference also called for the formation of a national women’s movement within South Africa mandated to draw up the women’s charter (Albertyn 1994:48). The need for women to participate in the constitution making process to ensure a gender sensitive constitution committing the new government to the promotion of gender equality was part of this process. Provisions for affirmative action and a national machinery for the advancement of gender equality were considered to be other important mechanisms for ensuring the empowerment of women in the new South African society (Ginwala 1991:69).

In May 1990, four months after the ANC was un-banned, another meeting in Lusaka planned the re-launch of the Women’s League within South Africa later that year. It carried the Malibongwe resolutions into the ANC executive resulting in the already mentioned policy statement,<sup>1</sup> which confirmed the autonomy of women’s emancipation, and promised to include women’s interests in a future constitution.<sup>2</sup> The “May 2 statement” also called on women to “move the ANC and the mass democratic movement to adopt policies and forms of organisation that facilitate the participation of women in the struggle that still lies before us” (Hassim 1991:66). A first step in this process was for the ANC Women’s Section to initiate a national movement to formulate the Charter of Women’s Rights so that “in their own voice women define issues of greatest concern to them” to have them included in the new constitution (Albertyn 1994:50). For Thandi Modise, a former MK soldier, it was all about wanting “to see ourselves there, participating” (Daniels 1992:24).

Despite these positive outcomes, the Lusaka meeting also affirmed that the thrust of the Women’s League would still be the organisation of women for national liberation in that “it was agreed that the initial thrust of the organisation would be to recruit members into the ANC”. The recruitment of women into the League was considered secondary (Hassim 1991:67). Such statements and intentions fed into the fears of feminist members of the League and the UDF

1. The statement was, apparently, drafted by Frene Ginwala; see Meintjes 1998:77.

2. Interview, Cape Town, 18 March 1996.

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aligned women's movements, who had begun to contemplate the future of the ANC Women's League. They asked how the League "can transform itself from being a vehicle for the greater involvement of women in the anti-apartheid struggle to being a vehicle for the expression of women's needs *within* the movement as well as in society more broadly". Even more important, perhaps, was the question if the Women's League, "as part of the future governing party is an appropriate vehicle to 'take the lead' in creating a non-sexist South Africa?" (Hassim 1991:67).

Behind this question lay the experience of the women's organisations attached to liberation movements in neighbouring countries, which after independence were granted no autonomy and instead ended up as a mobilising machinery for the ruling party they were attached to. Zambia, from where many ANC exiles returned, had proved "how the incorporation of women's organisations in the state had demobilised women's initiatives" (Meintjes 1998:76). The Women's Section thus came back from exile with the ideological commitment to continue the struggle of the earlier generation of women, while members of the UFD women's organisations within South Africa feared that the Women's Section's return might undermine their autonomy (Hassim and Gouws 1988:64). For members of UDF affiliated women's organisations, "the extent to which the un-banning and the political negotiations that followed this watershed event would fuel the convergence of progressive women's movements and enable a surprisingly successful campaign to put gender on the national agenda" remained surprising and unpredicted.

The fears of the more independent minded members of the women's movement seemed, however, initially to be coming true when the Women's League was re-launched in Durban in August 1990. Zubeida Jaffer, herself a member of the League, has described the meeting as follows:

Men were once again predominant. That afternoon the drum majorettes, the male bodyguards, the dominance of male speakers and the failure to highlight the specific pain experienced by women did little to inspire confidence. (Jaffer 1991:65)

For Shireen Hassim the re-launch was a "depressing affair for feminists" like herself, and Wendy Annecke observed that "there was little vision for the future role of women" (Hassim 1991:65; Annecke 1990:3).

The South African press also seemed to have been guided by visions of powerless women's wings in neighbouring countries when they assessed the return of the ANCWL. Headlines such as "Women's place is in the struggle. But the struggle ignores them", "Women do have a place in the struggle – it's behind typewriters", "Standing up and not being counted", or "Women's League: Giving a voice to the powerless, mute and exploited or... the *koeksuster tannies* of the ANC?"<sup>1</sup> all anticipated that the League would end up as an auxiliary to the male party as had happened in so many other newly-independent African countries. Journalists also charged that the League membership was split between the

1. Cassandra Moodley, 'Women's place is in the struggle but the struggle ignores them', *Daily Mail* (Durban), 9 August 1990; Emma Gilbey in *Weekly Mail*, 2 November 1990; Zubeida Jaffer in *Cosmopolitan*, January 1991; Mark Gevisser in *Weekly Mail*, 19 April 1991.

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older “motherists” and young feminist inspired women<sup>1</sup> (Gevisser 1991) and they predicted a take-over of the more conservative elements. But younger League members had already asserted themselves against the older generation. Mavivi Manzini, then an executive member of the Women’s League explained that “there is a shift because of the younger people. The older women speak a different language, but they are not resisting changes.” (Daniels 1991:35)

Many commentators predicted that the direction of the League would be determined by the leadership elected during the first National Conference in 1991. In the event, the conference voted against Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, and for Gertrude Shope as president and Albertina Sisulu as her deputy, who were despite their “motherist” background supportive of the younger women’s agenda. A former member of the League explained that the election result was based on a political decision, which went against Madikizela-Mandela, then the wife of Nelson Mandela, not so much because she was at the time linked to the murder and abduction of youths in Soweto (Gilbey 1993), but that the “main motivation for people not to vote for her was because they did not want the Women’s League to be like in Zimbabwe, where it was being led by the wife of the president... so it was a deliberate strategy... to specifically avoid the kind of Women’s League in other countries”.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the *Namibian* reported that Sisulu withdrew her bid for the presidency of the League “to prevent a split vote that could have allowed Madikizela-Mandela to win the leadership position”.<sup>3</sup> It was thus that the ANCWL in the first years of its existence managed to create a healthy mix of “motherists”, who perhaps were able to appeal to an older and more conservative constituency, and young feminists, who attracted the interest of young professional women and more radical activists (Naudascher-Schlag 1993:31). The national executive represented the different constituencies and different strands of thinking where some women “believe in women’s traditional role of bearing children and serving men. Others believe that women must be liberated from all forms of exploitation and oppression”.<sup>4</sup> Former members of the League who belonged to the latter category of active participants suggested that at the time – until 1993 when the second National Conference voted Madikizela-Mandela into the presidency – almost all the important women in the ANC – feminists included – were active in the Women’s League “because it tended to be a useful place to be”.<sup>5</sup> What perhaps also contributed to the fact that feminists found a home in the ANCWL was the deliberate strategy to re-launch the Women’s League as an autonomous women’s organisation under the overall umbrella of the ANC (Beall 1990:11).

The collective positions of the 1991 conference confirmed the progressive outlook of the Women’s League. Amongst them was the demand for a 30 per

1. Mark Gevisser, *Weekly Mail*, 19 April 1991.

2. Interview, former executive member of the ANC Women’s League in Natal, Durban, 23 March 1995. (See also Daniels 1991:36).

3. *The Namibian* (Windhoek), 30 March 1991.

4. ‘The Women’s League – a fighting force?’ *Speak*, 35, 1991, p. 5.

5. Interview, Durban, 23 March 1995.

cent quota for the representation of women in all elected positions in the ANC. The resolutions also revived the idea of an internal ANC Commission on Emancipation in order to ensure that "all issues of discrimination against women within our movement are taken up beyond mission statements". The Women's League thus embraced a two pronged approach reminiscent of the resolutions of the UN World Conference in Beijing four years later, demanding both a gender balance in decision making and the mainstreaming of gender concerns within the party itself. The strategy was clearly designed to avoid the marginalisation of women in a women's wing. Other topics of strategic importance were discussions about the formation of a national women's movement and the drawing up of the Women's Charter as ways for women to effectively influence the transition period and the future of national politics.

Initially the League was not successful when it brought the quota issue before the National ANC conference two months later. Participants have suggested that the reasons for the heated debate on the quota, which led to the withdrawal of the motion before it was put to the vote, was the fact that the majority of the conference participants were men (Pillay 1992:5) who had not been part of the debate which had led to the earlier "agreement in principle" on the quota. The League itself had been side tracked into campaigns against politically motivated violence in Natal. For Ginwala, herself not a member of the League, the outcome signified that "by allowing the broader national issue to overwhelm it, the League lent substance to those critics who have long argued that a women's organisation attached to the ANC would inevitably subordinate women's interests" (Ginwala 1991:69). For others the outcome was disappointing because "it proved that even when you are promised support from senior leadership, it does not mean that you'll get it". Ultimately this heightened the need to set up the ANC's Commission for Emancipation of Women, which had been talked about and been agreed upon since 1987 (Hurt 1991:10-13).

Perhaps more difficult to overcome than generational differences were divisions based on political affiliation. Fears were expressed that because in South Africa "the women's issue is subordinated to the broader struggle", and because political alliances had been the basis of much of the black-on-black violence in the latter part of the 1980s, sisterhood across political battle lines and under a feminist banner might not come easy.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the ANCWL had a resounding success in gaining support for the charter campaign.

#### **The Women's National Coalition: "Seizing the Hour"**

The early success of the ANC Women's League in avoiding a polarisation between 'motherists' and feminists within their own ranks and the success its members had initiating a larger non-partisan, multi-racial women's movement was premised on a number of factors unique to South Africa. Unlike in neighbouring countries South African women had at the time of the transition a long history of united action, which transcended not only urban-rural, educational

1. Ross Posel quoted by Moodley 1990.

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and generational gaps but also racial and political boundaries. The successful show of solidarity of FSAW in the 1950s served as an important precedent for the experience that women had common interests that could be pursued more effectively in a united front.

Moreover, the UDF and the mass democratic movement of the 1980s had further cemented the notion of unity and had consciously encouraged debate between progressive women and women adhering to more conservative notions of womanhood. Attempts in the mid-eighties to revive FSAW as a new FEDSAW explicitly reflected the traditions of the 1950s and represented an attempt to “nurture other smaller women’s groups, acting as a vehicle for women to participate in political organisation” (Dawber 1984:31). A first step towards the formation of a broader women’s movement had been the formation of the UDF Women’s Congress, which gathered UDF aligned women’s groups in 1987 (Govender 1987:75), leading discussions in its member organisations about the future role and structure of FEDSAW (Govender1987a:79).

What might also have worked to the advantage of South African women was the fact that through the 1980s many of those members who had emerged “proudly feminist, articulate and unsympathetic to charges that the fight for women’s equality was a bourgeois, middle class preoccupation” (Thamm 1994), were educated, professional women. They were motivated to follow the debates on feminism, and to keep discussion about strategy and aims alive. Yet, radical views were not only held by “sophisticated women”. In 1996 Brigitte Mabandla, then a deputy minister, explained that members of rural women’s organisations were

... more vocal about the essence of women’s liberation, they talk about emancipation from patriarchal control, the traditional system, they talk about equal access to resources, and that is profound. They also have a stand on abortion, that women have a choice. The assumption that this is imposed by the elite does not hold water in South Africa. It is, you see, the struggle atmosphere in the country [which] enabled women to at least claim the space to talk. It is not like in other countries really, even though they were suppressed in the internal days of the 1980s when we said struggle first, gender last.<sup>1</sup>

It was thus perhaps not the ANCWL that united women in the Women’s National Coalition but rather the specific history of the South African liberation struggle – and the women’s organisations subsumed under it. Another important factor was of course the realisation that a broad alliance of women was needed in order for women to have influence not just on specific women’s issues but also on political and economic policy in the transition period. Ginwala, for example, clearly realised that the ANC Women’s League could not realistically be expected to liberate women. During a roundtable discussion on the “May 2 statement” she articulated the need for a strong national women’s organisation “if we are going to push for a real challenge to gender oppression and the real emancipation of women”. In her opinion it was not up to the ANC Women’s League to affiliate other autonomous women’s organisations – as had been attempted in neighbouring countries – but, on the contrary, for the League to affiliate to a larger national women’s federation (Beall 1990:13–14). She also realised that

1. Interview, Cape Town, 20 March 1996.

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policy statements like the “May 2 statement” had normative value only. In order to implement it power was needed and “women’s liberation is about power. Unless we empower women organisationally, we can’t liberate ourselves.” (Beall 1990:14)

The formation of the Women’s National Coalition (WNC) in April 1992 with an ultimate membership of 92 national organisations and 13 regional coalitions in 1994, covering most political parties, rural women’s organisations, and religious and professional organisations caused both astonishment and admiration. Jo-Anne Collinge suggested in the Johannesburg *Star* that with the WNC women had displayed an organisational force and quality that took them far beyond men. She saw this grounded in “a common sense of grievance and outrage at the discrimination they experience simply because of their gender” with “no capacity for broader ideological positioning” (Collinge 1992). For outside observers the WNC was the “most ambitious participatory research project of its kind in the world”.<sup>1</sup>

The Coalition represented both a political campaign to mobilise and educate women at grassroots level and an attempt to influence the political process of writing the constitution (Albertyn 1994:51). The approach was participatory, engaging South African women in defining their concerns and experiences to be distilled into a *Women’s Charter for Effective Equality*, which in turn was to inform the Bill of Rights. The focus on women’s rights was an “important political resource, which allowed women to mobilise without necessarily confronting the differences between them” and was part of a “feminist project to develop a substantive understanding of equality in the constitution and the law” (Albertyn 1994:52).

There was also a feeling of urgency which might have helped cement women’s unity, because when the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) had been founded three months earlier it had turned out to be an “all male choir”<sup>2</sup> where only a handful of women had speaking and voting rights. The ANCWL was particularly determined about ensuring that more women would be represented on CODESA.<sup>3</sup> Together with the pressure exerted by women’s organisations affiliated to the WNC a Gender Advisory Committee (GAC) as a sub-committee of the CODESA management committee was successfully pushed for. But even though the establishment of GAC was important in that it implied the recognition of women’s specific political interests and concerns, it was a weak structure with merely advisory powers. Its 26 members had only a few weeks to agree on recommendations and it had to fight with ignorance on gender issues both among male CODESA delegates and non-ANC women members of GAC. The committee was never able to present its recommendations before CODESA 2 collapsed on account of renewed political violence in 1993 (Friedman 1993:129 ff).

The Multi-Party Negotiation Process (MPNP) which continued the negotiation process later that year, again appointed only a minimal number of women.

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1. Former Canadian MP Flora McDonald quoted in Sheperd 1993:40.

2. Title of an article in *Speak*, 38, 1992, p.18.

3. ‘Women want representation at Codesa’, *Work in Progress*, No 81, 1992, p. 16.

Again under pressure, mostly from within the WNC and women via their parties, consensus was reached allowing one woman delegate on each political delegation and technical committee. In addition a WNC monitoring group was established and mandated to co-ordinate the communication between women delegates, WNC and constituencies outside. In addition members of the ANC's National Commission of the Emancipation of Women had established another negotiation support team working with outside agencies. It made a number of submissions to the MPNP including one on customary law and equality. The Commission members nonetheless concluded after the talks that gender lobbies perhaps focused too strongly on representation issues only:

We have not always looked at women's empowerment beyond representation and we have not always developed ways of empowering women we have put into structures nor have we been able to ensure that those are accountable.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of effectiveness of women delegates at the talks was perhaps due to the overall marginalisation of gender issues in MPNP processes and the added difficulties women had in participating fully in the formal and informal networks (Albertyn 1994:56), where according to Baleka Kgositsile "the culture had already been established and women were not part of that".<sup>2</sup>

There were successes, however. Women delegates successfully intervened on the status of customary law in the constitution, which the traditional leaders wanted to have excluded from the gender equality clause. But even though the women's lobby effected a compromise,<sup>3</sup> the final constitution is still far from clear on the status of customary law (Nhlapo 1995:158 ff). Women delegates were also able to press for the establishment of the Sub-Council on Women on the Transitional Executive Committee, one of six that were to manage the transition to the 1994 elections. The fact that women delegates were able to persuade men to accept that women should make up at least half of each of the delegations at the negotiation forum so that they gained representation within it, was also a great achievement which some believe was particularly important in promoting the idea of the existence of specific women's rights.

Parallel to this process of influencing the transitional negotiation process, the WNC engaged in a participatory research project for the *Women's Charter for Effective Equality* gathering the demands and testimonies of some 2 million women across South Africa (Meintjes 1998:81), often in difficult circumstances. The demands that were endorsed by a National Convention of the Coalition in February 1994 were radical, requiring "society to be reorganised, and its institutions to be restructured to take cognisance of all women" and they called for equality in all spheres of public and private life, including family life and partnerships, custom, culture and religion (Women's National Coalition 1994). Yet, as commentators have pointed out, controversial issues were either left out or toned down in the name of maintaining unity. Thus the potentially divisive issues such as lesbianism and abortion were circumvented (Cock 1997:312) and

1. ANC Commission of the Emancipation of Women, *Report to the ANC National Conference*.

2. Quoted in Cock 1997:323.

3. For a detailed account of the intervention, see Albertyn 1994:57.

references to polygamy and *lobola*, issues that had been critically raised<sup>1</sup> by rural women's organisations, were addressed only indirectly. In fact, conflict over the direction, content, and style of the charter campaign led to resignations and threatened to derail the whole project.

The cautious formulations of the Charter were an indicator of the conflicts, anxieties and acrimony the Coalition had to deal with about the recognition of "the commonalties of our subordination as women" (Women's National Coalition 1994:preamble) and the "potential to exercise a power greater than the sum of its individual affiliates" (Kemp 1995:151). So strong were the issues of power and control within the Coalition along political, and also racial lines, that there was no formal voting because the modalities could not be agreed upon. Problems related to the fact that some affiliated organisations had a very small membership while others were broad based and that many organisations had a predominantly white membership. Thus "one vote per organisation could magnify the voice of white women". The solution was an operation on the basis of broad consensus, which in practice meant that a clear majority perspective emerged in a given discussion (Kemp 1995:152).

The experience of being excluded from the negotiations early on created commitment to the principles of both inclusive and political non-aligned, with the consequence that the coalition had the difficult task of "balancing expertise, experience and organisational affiliation, racial group and affirmative action".<sup>2</sup> For that reason the coalition also avoided a feminist image and its members did not feel obliged "to homogenise women's experiences". Instead it allowed for "diverse women to assert different understandings and aspirations" thus providing a "platform for the formulation of gender-specific demands by women who generally did not accept the label feminism" (Cock 1997:319).

Hassim has in detail discussed how the WNC had to reduce the demands of women diverse enough, to lack a "common language ... in which to speak of women's needs", "to the lowest common denominator" and that even then the charter had to be refaced with a statement declaring the contents to be a collection of all the demands submitted to the coalition and that member organisations did not necessarily support the charter in its entirety (Hassim 2002:705, 713).

The growing literature analysing the experiences of the WNC has established no consensus on what actually facilitated its legendary success. Some believe that the notion of motherhood was again ultimately the unifying trump<sup>3</sup> for others it was its concentration on post-structuralist feminist themes, such as the insistence on difference and the refusal to assume a common female oppression (Cock 1997:321). Still others believe the success of the WNC to be rooted in the "strategic spaces opened up by the transition process" (Hassim and Gouws 1988:65). Others have also pointed out the involvement of political parties, and the successful alliance of gender activists, academics and women politicians as key factors of its success (Hassim 2002:726).

1. For a detailed account of the charter campaign and the issues that were tackled see Hassim 2002.

2. A. Letsebe and F. Ginwala, quoted in Cock 1997:316.

3. Gertrud Fester quoted in Hassim and Gouws 1988:65.

The WNC's influence on the constitutional process was perhaps not as effective and far reaching as were its attempts at bringing together diverse women's organisations. The Charter was presented to the Constitutional Assembly in August 1994, too late to impact decisively on the constitution writing process. The final Constitution adopted in May 1996 did not, as was anticipated, make the Women's Charter part of the Bill of Rights, but it enshrined the ideas of gender equality and the possibility of affirmative action, making it one of the most gender sensitive constitutions in the world. But the specificities pertaining to gender rights ultimately collapsed into a broad equality clause which has been said is likely "to become a terrain of struggle for women who wish to challenge the status quo" for example in relationship to customary practices (Kadalie 1995:66).

The Constitution also provided for a Commission for Gender Equality, something that was not the result of direct lobbying by the women's movement, even though suitable "national machinery" for gender equality had been discussed since 1992. The provision was included at the last minute without consultation, apparently "as an attempt to find a compromise" between the opposed positions of traditional leaders and women regarding the status of customary law (Albertyn 1995:10, 21). Even though the women's movement was divided over the desirability of the proposed commission, it represented a step towards its goal to ensure that the responsibility for the enforcement of gender equality be placed with the state rather than with individual women or women's organisations (Ginwala 1991).

Between 1992 and 1994 the WNC represented an example of strength through unity which has remained unique in South Africa and beyond. The Charter Campaign started a process of empowerment to question and change society. The fact that rural women went centre-stage when they questioned traditional law and made it a national issue was another aspect that has remained unique. Not only did it put rural women at the forefront of gender struggles but it also indicated that, after all, some women delegates at the MPNP were willing to put sisterhood before other alliances. Stella Sicgau, a delegate of the Cape Traditional Leaders Organisation, for example, supported the motion of the WNC against traditional leaders to subordinate customary law to the Bill of Rights (Cock 1997:325, Albertyn 1994:58), even though she was not backed by women delegates of political parties (Wessels 1993:31). For Jacklyn Cock the greatest achievement of the WNC was the fact that in its acknowledgement of diversity it challenged monolithic Western feminist notions of sisterhood, putting instead liberation in a broader context in its place (Cock 1997:322).

Perhaps the achievements of the WNC are even more visible against the backdrop of attitudes to gender equality amongst ANC rank and file, and smaller parties. The report of the ANC Commission on the Emancipation of Women in December 1994 painted a grim picture of ANC commitment to gender equality amongst its members. It pointed out that women were still mainly secretaries in ANC departments, and nothing was done to effectively empower them and integrate them into mainstream policy and decision-making. In provincial offices, women were often recognised as members of the Women's

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League only, and ANC policies on gender equality and affirmative action were neither understood nor heeded by the majority of ANC members.<sup>1</sup> The IFP defined women exclusively as “mothers of the nation” and the National Party was even less tuned into gender equality. NP members of parliament thought of their few female colleagues as “little roses” who wore “a smart blue suit with a double row of pearls”,<sup>2</sup> and who were placed in the auxiliary Women’s Action (Vroue Aksie), the women’s section of the party where the wives of party bosses garnered support for their husbands (Jaffer 1991:66).

But despite the achievements of overcoming solid opposition and lack of understanding, commentators have also pointed to weaknesses of the WNC. Unlike the labour movement, Kathy Albertyn has suggested, the women’s movement was due to its history of being subsumed under the liberation struggle, too weak to put significant pressure on the negotiation process (Albertyn 1994:56). Thus, even though the vast diversity of its member organisations was its strength, it was also its weakness, “because the diversity was so great that the Coalition could never move or campaign on issues. Its wide appeal made it immobile”.<sup>3</sup> The former convenor of the WNC, Ginwala, suggests that the coalition made a mistake by being expressively non-political rather than just being non-party political. For her, treating women’s concerns as mere social issues was reactionary.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, she believes that the decision the WNC took in 1994 to bar women who had entered the political arena as legislators in national and provincial parliaments from standing for office in the WNC was a grave mistake. The decision created a crisis in the women’s movement, and it succeeded in “casting the parliamentarians adrift”. In effect the whole leadership of the WNC resigned, and that, she believes, meant that experiences of successes in the WNC were lost, that there was no continuity and that ultimately the women’s movement was weakened.

To some degree, however, the ultimate act of destruction of the WNC was introduced by the actions of the ANCWL who had in 1994 after the ratification of the Women’s Charter decided that the WNC had fulfilled its immediate mandate. As a consequence the WL withdrew its representatives, instructed its branches not to work with the coalition any longer going so far as to brand its members who joined WNC activities in other capacities as disloyal and undisciplined (Hassim 2002:727). Even though the WNC has continued to exist after 1994, it has, as was predicted in its heyday, lost its momentum, its future dependent on a topic able to unite all women again.<sup>5</sup>

The need for a women’s movement able to address gender concerns in political terms has become even more important since the ANCWL has declined. As much as the organisation was a “political mover” in the early 1990s, this changed after the 1994 national elections, which left the organisation without a

1. ANC Commission on the Emancipation of Women, Report to the 49th National ANC Conference, December 1994.
2. Interview, Cape Town, 19 March 1996.
3. Interview, Durban, 23 March 1995.
4. Interview, Cape Town, 22 May 1995.
5. Pregs Govender, quoted by Trezn 1993:29.

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sense of direction. Many commentators also maintain that the election of Madikizela-Mandela as League president in December 1993 further paralysed its potential (Chothia 1993:6). The election result was in the mind of a former member, a political decision which had less to do with the future of the Women's League and more to do with it being "a short-cut to getting many ANC votes to have Winnie in the League".<sup>1</sup> The decision might have helped gain votes for the ANC but it effectively closed the Women's League's short history as a progressive women's voice. In 1997 the League was further weakened when 11 prominent members resigned from the executive, following many other women who had already left. The reasons for the resignations were Madikizela-Mandela's autocratic leadership style, the fact the League was no longer concerned with issues of women's emancipation but with doubtful business ventures<sup>2</sup> and that it served its leader as "a platform to launch attacks against the ANC".<sup>3</sup>

For some ANC members the split in the League was neither surprising nor bad, since even though the organisation managed to fill a gap for a time, it could not have continued to do so without separating from the ANC entirely. After its much delayed National Conference in April 1997 which re-elected Madikizela-Mandela as president, Rhoda Kadalie charged that the disorganisation and lack of a programme of action of the organisation indicated that the League had ceased to be a "dominant conduit for women's voices". Instead it had become "as moribund and ineffectual as most post-independence women's party organisations have become elsewhere" (Kadalie 1997). Madizikela-Mandela enthused in her speech accepting the position as president of the League in Rustenburg in April 1997:

We, the women are bouncing into the 21st century, prancing straddling the road to freedom, majestically walking tall, entering the 21st century with pride and determination to achieve total liberation for our children. I will lead you to the promised land now that you have given me the resounding mandate to do so.<sup>4</sup>

The followers who might have been wooed by such rhetoric must have represented only a small fraction of South Africa's women, and hardly a majority at all.

Not included in the constituency of followers were many rural women whose home had previously been the ANCWL. Membership has suffered both from the effects of the national executive first engaged devoting its time to parliamentary duties and then resigning over the leadership style of its president. At the provincial and local level, too, League leaders have moved into provincial parliaments and councils, having rendered the operations of the Women's League at local level close to non-existent. A 1997 study in a rural area of Northern Province revealed that the ANCWL was conceptualised by many residents as a "tra-

1. Interview, Durban, 23 March 1995.

2. *Weekly Mail*, June 5 to 11, 1992; *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 19 February 1995; *Sunday Tribune* (Durban), 12 February 1995.

3. *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 13 to 19 September 1996.

4. ANCWL, National Conference Report. Rustenburg Civic Centre 23–27 April 1997. Acceptance speech by Winnie Madizikela-Mandela.

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ditional dance group”, rather than a political force furthering women’s rights. The League branch in that community had not bothered to renew its term of office or formally elect a leader since 1994, and allegations of corruption and mismanagement of self-appointed leaders kept women away. In fact, for rural women in that underdeveloped area, national gender politics were of no immediate relevance, with life revolving instead around the most basic of needs (Mokgope 1998). Allegations of “poor mass activism”, “low levels of political consciousness among members”, and poor organisation had also been the verdict of ANC secretary-general Kgalema Motlanthe when he talked about League performance at a national general council meeting of the ANC in July 2000, and he blamed the leadership for failing to connect to its membership and to the national machinery for the advancement of women (Kindra 2000). In 1995 Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, then the Deputy Minister of Welfare and Population Development, believed that instead of a strong women’s movement there was only a “major vacuum” (Speed 1995:10). This, and the situation in rural areas, would suggest that the concerns of the autonomous women’s movement in South Africa at the time of the return of the ANCWL were neither misplaced nor were the consequences pursued actively enough.

The formation of the WNC was significantly based on the history of women’s movements in South Africa. It left an important legacy of mobilising women as a constituency that, Hassim has optimistically noted, is “both institutional in the creation of the national machinery for women, as well as political, in that it has created a reference point for future movement battles” (Hassim and Gouws 1988:68). But the national machinery for women, which in South Africa has been broadly designed and with the aim of mainstreaming gender concerns, and the large number of women in parliament might have helped demobilise a broad based and functioning women’s movement.

In 1994 and since then, commentators have suggested that what is urgently needed is “for women to organise themselves into a strong mass-based women’s movement” as the key tool for transformation (Madlala 1994:7). Its power would also be able to take up the challenge to “create mechanisms for communication, support and accountability between the women’s movement in civil society and women inside the state” (Hassim and Gouws 1988:68). These problems, as we shall see, lie at the heart of the failure of South Africa’s sisters in neighbouring countries where they have not been sufficiently addressed, and they still face South African women despite their successes.

## CHAPTER 4

## The Women's League Syndrome

### *A Non-Decision-Making Machinery*

The strategies South African women employed in the 1980s were informed not only by the long history of their involvement in the political struggle against *apartheid*, but also by the benefit of being able to take into account the experiences of women in neighbouring countries. In exile many women had lived in Zambia, Tanzania, and Botswana where they were confronted by state and party controlled women's movements. As women's leagues were characterised by "oversized women dressed in party garb... dancing at the airport ... who never cease to sing praises for the president"<sup>1</sup> their members had remained powerless "parroting figures"<sup>2</sup> with no political influence and no ambitions to promote women's emancipation. Moreover, many women's leagues came to be identified as the only national women's movement, apparently speaking for all women, effectively curtailing the autonomy of the women's movement and the independence of progressive "feminist" voices.

What was considered problematic, also for South African women, was the experience that when nationalist liberation movements moved from opposition to government the parameters of women's involvement often changed profoundly. Liberation movements tended to be more inclusive allowing women political spaces in order to claim their energies for the struggle. While this desire did not change after independence, women's involvement came to be circumscribed as being passive and auxiliary. Political parties developed more particularistic goals, which did not represent the aspirations of all citizens and often no longer included the concerns of women. Autonomous women's movements, not tied to political parties or their particularistic aims alone thus became more important while the interests of political parties and governments to contain, co-opt or divide movements grew.

The limitations of being subsumed under political parties were most obvious in situations where the party was identical with the government – worst in one-party states and bad in countries with large majority parties – but they were not restricted to these. Botswana, with a reputation of being "the shining star of liberal democracy"<sup>3</sup> failed to grant women political space to pursue their own concerns until well into the 1990s. In Zimbabwe, nominally a democracy since independence in 1980, the situation has hardly been different. And in Mozam-

1. 'No regrets in wearing Mugabe portrait: Chikwinya', *Zimbabwe Independent*, 10 September 1999.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Ataliah Molokomme quoted in Makan 1997:84.

bique the party's women's wing was expected to be national machinery, national women's movement and development agency under the direction of FRELIMO until it was cut off from party funds when membership figures had dropped in the early 1990s.

Whatever the political variations of the government forms women's leagues occur in they have many striking similarities. The history of the Women's League of the United Independence Party (UNIP) in Zambia is by no means an exceptional example of "state feminism" which "has propagated highly conservative ideas, never failing to remind women of their primary obligations as wives and mothers" and has played "key roles in mobilising women in support of ruling regimes" (Mama 1997). Key themes in the history of this organisation in the 1970s and 1980s are mirrored in other places and at other times.

#### **The UNIP Women's League in Zambia: *Morality and men***

The UNIP Women's Brigade was established in the early days of the independence movement in the 1950s and mandated to mobilise women for the anti-colonialist struggle. Some sources suggest that initially its members "had been fairly independent of the UNIP leadership" and their engagement had at times been radical. The Brigade was formally made into a subordinate party auxiliary only two years prior to independence (Allen 1991:206–209) but "working within the Brigade bound and limited its members to supportive roles" from the very start. Brigade members were not expected to seek political power for themselves but rather help men achieve it, and the Brigade had no independent leadership structures, but, on the contrary, men appointed its officials, and dictated its policies and activities (Schuster 1993).

At independence the Women's Brigade was an "all men affair", where men even decided the agendas of its meetings (Schuster 1993:17). The decline of women's radicalism and autonomy coincided with a shift in UNIP from a more militant nationalist movement led by young members of the disenfranchised to a political party that built its support on clientelism and patronage. The shift meant that the "Women's Brigade became more and more of a body for disciplining women voters and abusing opposition supporters for as long as legal opposition existed" (Allen 1991:210–211). But the conservatism the Brigade displayed in the 1970s can also be traced to the very *raison d'être* of establishing a separate women's section within a broader organisation.

Schuster has convincingly argued that because women were not allowed to associate with men freely, their activities in an all women group effectively helped limit male anxiety over their moral conduct. The moral protection the Brigade offered to women meant that its members had to abide by the moral standards set by men. Central to these were male informed ideals of womanhood. In addition, Brigade women exaggerated moral rectitude as a way of gaining a competitive advantage over younger women for the favours of income earning men. Brigade members thus had to limit their political and social roles (Schuster 1993:19).

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The creation of an exaggerated image of obedient womanhood was, indeed, particularly important for the Women's Brigade, whose membership hailed largely from an older generation of urban dwellers, with little formal education and with European style middle-class expectations. Many of its members were small-scale marketeers, who eked out a living in the urban informal sector. In the urban environment of the 1970s they were certainly more dependent on men to realise their aspirations for a better life than were their rural sisters on their husbands for survival. They were therefore also more fiercely attached to the institution of marriage. The competition for educated husbands who represented the easiest access to socially upward mobility increased as a new generation of young women emerged in the urban centres. The "new woman" was characterised by Schuster as

... a young pioneer in the capital cities: a teacher, a nurse, a university student, a stenographer, a typist – in fact, all the conventional occupations of Western women and more. ... She symbolises modernity, achievement, the competence of black people, a new black aesthetic and pride. (Schuster 1979:1)

This new generation of women was not dependent on men for their survival and social status. Thus they tended to reject "traditional" notions of womanhood, instead choosing to forgo, for a period at least, husband and children in favour of a more carefree single status keeping and dropping boyfriends and taking liberties in public that were unheard of before. These young women created a powerful competition for the older, more "traditional" oriented generation not in that they were serious competitors on the marriage market but because they were cast as the potential girlfriends of husbands, drawing attention and resources away from the household. And even if the "man-eating" and family destroying vices of young professional women were largely a myth, their independence and defiance of "traditional" behaviour in themselves threatened the respect which adherence to such norms had previously entailed for the older women.

Myths of immoral young women out to destroy law-abiding families and Zambian values were fed by African men, including the government leadership, in a strategy beneficial to their own interests in more than one way. It created divisions between women limiting their power to oppose men and claim a greater share of the spoils of independence and it distracted attention from men's claim to the right to be promiscuous. As the economy declined in the 1980s young women also offered the government official scapegoats for the negative effects of mismanagement, nepotism, and clientelism. Most of all, however, the discourse on the immorality of young women helped limit the political clout of women, in that it pushed the members of the Women's Brigade into ever deeper conservatism, thus sealing their dependency and powerlessness.

Initially, writes Schuster, the "ruling elite continued to consider the co-operation of the female citizens necessary to consolidate its power" particularly against the opposition of the United People's Party (UPP), the main opposition party, before the country became a UNIP ruled one-party state in 1972. From then on the handful of educated women who were initially promoted could no longer operate with any independence but were reduced to propagandising the

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policies of the male controlled one-party state. Gradually they disappeared from politics, either because they were demoted or because they distanced themselves from the kind of politics advocated by UNIP and the Women's Brigade (Schuster 1993:22–23). With them younger educated women, who were attacked by the organisation, turned away from politics and shunned involvement in its ranks.

The number of women in parliament subsequently decreased. Between 1968 and 1988 under one-party state rule the percentage of women elected to parliament dropped from 3 further to 2 and even 1 per cent of the total number of MPs.<sup>1</sup> After 1973 no women were again nominated to reserved seats in parliament and until the 1988 election no other woman was promoted to a ministerial position (Ng'andu 1987:129).

By the mid-seventies the Women's Brigade was so embroiled in an aggressive defence of "traditional" values that its up-grading under the name of Women's League to a quasi-autonomous organisation with its own constitution and executive secretary, who was automatically a member of the central committee, did nothing to change its direction. This was perhaps not surprising because the executive secretary was still appointed by the president, and promotion was only granted to those who faithfully toed the party line. Independent women's voices were excluded from the party and thus from government decision-making bodies (Geisler 1987:45). The constitution of the Women's League, too, was largely a reiteration of UNIP party objectives, including the "fight against hunger, ignorance, disease, drunkenness, crime and exploitation of man by man" and "all forms of exploitative international capitalism". No doubt the fact that the League was to organise women and "encourage them to bring up children in accordance with the objectives of the party" indicated that its role had not changed (Ng'andu 1987:132).

In 1970 at the first Women's Rights Conference organised in Zambia, Betty Kaunda, the wife of the president, had assured Zambian men that when "we talk about women's rights...we have no desire to offend" men and that "we do not intend to neglect our duties in the home" nor question the authority and power vested in men. Far from wanting to overthrow tradition, they wished to nurture it. Correspondingly her vision of women's future was a "traditionalist" one:

We talk about woman power but we do not mean it as a threat to man power! I see a new role for women, a new task for woman power: we must be the custodians of happiness and security in the home, the watchdogs of morality in our society.<sup>2</sup>

This discourse on women's emancipation as a return to "traditional" roles was applied not only in the social development projects the Women's League dabbled in, but it was also applied in politics. Chibesa Kankassa, the long time executive secretary of the Women's League and one of the few women represented on the UNIP Central Committee, explained in 1994 with hindsight that her

1. B.Z. Osei-Hwedie, 'Women's Role in Zambian Politics: Comparative Analysis of the First, Second and Third Republics'. Unpublished Paper, University of Botswana, n.d., p. 5.  
2. Quoted by Schuster 1979:174.

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political fight for women's rights, notably paid maternity leave, was carried out in a way so that "men could understand our wishes":

Our lobby was not, you know, to confront men, it was begging. When we knew that we were still very few [women], if we let ourselves fight, we were going to lose... If we would get arrogant they would also become arrogant. So we had to start begging. And, you know with an honour. So even when we work in the same place when it comes to the house you are the boss. So we persuaded them.<sup>1</sup>

Bernadette Sikanika, who served on the executive committee of the Women's League under Kankassa, has suggested that her friend "really had the upper hand", even if she did not show it:

They were also scared of our power, although that power was not a power they understood politically. Politically they understood that if they didn't give us some of our dignity they would lose politically. We showed them that we were responsible and acted with dignity.<sup>2</sup>

If Kankassa had the upper hand, she did not use that advantage to push for legal reforms which might have helped prepare the ground for greater acknowledgement of gender equity goals, beyond maternity leave. Instead she lobbied for a ban on beauty contests, not so much because they objectified women's bodies, but because the contestants had become local substitutes for pin-up girls popular among urban men (Schuster 1979). Other important campaign issues of the Women's League, the fight against abortion, pre-marital sex and teenage pregnancies, might have had something to do with what was perceived as immorality, but they were not phenomena restricted to urban areas. Moreover, by putting the blame on young women and exempting men from responsibility the Women's League encroached on the few rights women had gained.

With its emphasis on "traditional values" the Women's League executive, of course, never considered gender equity an important issue to pursue. On the contrary, young professional women who espoused a women's liberation agenda of a sort were clearly identified as "she-devils" who had to be stopped. In fact, through the 1970s and 1980s government rhetoric suggested that Zambian women were already equal to men and that if they still lagged behind it was their own fault (Schuster 1979:155; Ng'andu 1987:131). The report of the Women's League to the United Nations in 1975, for example, asserted confidently that "the question of women's rights in Zambia does not arise".<sup>3</sup> Behind such rhetoric lay the desire to encourage women to take up the challenge of doing their part in developing the country.

In December 1994 Kaunda had told a Women's League General Conference that women were given "maximum participation in the revolution, because they have a right to life and therefore an equal obligation to sustain life in Zambia. Rights are not independent of obligations." He therefore ordered women to show "their heroism by creating wealth for the country by replacing copper with agricultural produce". To that aim the League was called upon not to be "swal-

1. Interview, Lusaka, 17 January 1994.

2. Interview, Lusaka, 17 January 1994.

3. Both quoted in Freedom House, *Women are the strength of a nation*, Lusaka 1975.

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lowed in (sic!) the realities of feminine movements” but instead to “bring forth to the nation a motherly body that will nourish the Zambian revolution”.<sup>1</sup>

The Women's League took such admonishment only partially to heart. They had no interest in growing food, in rural life or rural development issues. Thus the contributions the League made over the years in that field of activity were at best pathetic. In 1972 they suggested the formation of funeral committees, which were reminiscent of their main activity during the nationalist struggle, to make “arrangements for the dead and help the bereaved” (Schuster 1979:161) and in 1985 the building of teachers' houses on a self-help basis was considered their first priority.<sup>2</sup> On the Copperbelt in the same year a restaurant for stranded travellers never moved beyond the planning stage.<sup>3</sup> Rural women, who in Zambia already shouldered the most of peasant based agricultural production were nonetheless called upon to be committed to food production.<sup>4</sup> They were to do this against the background of rampant mismanagement in the agricultural sector, which had led to the dismal state of agriculture in the first place, with the aid of a 10 year plan of action, designed by the Women's League. The plan had a popular pseudo-socialist approach which also never moved beyond the planning stage.<sup>5</sup> Beyond these grander schemes UNIP chairladies in the provinces and districts, the “Mama Regional” and down, ran sewing and cooking clubs, and offered “leadership courses” which reiterated the phraseology of “humanism” and passed down party directives. But even such modest efforts often floundered on account of a lack of resources, with Women's League representatives always being the last to be granted scarce party or government funds (Geisler 1987:54).

The only economic issue of real interest to the League was the retaining of their members' privileges as marketeers. Many League members pursued small-scale informal sector trading activities, and they managed to establish a working relationship with the party based on mutual support.<sup>6</sup> UNIP expected marketeers to be card carrying UNIP members who were willing to be rounded up by party vigilantes and to be transported by the truckload to UNIP rallies and to airports for arriving and departing dignitaries. In return they were allocated stalls and left by and large in peace. Occasionally the government reminded marketeers of their vulnerable situation in “clean-up” operations, with police on horseback chasing women traders from footpaths and party vigilantes harassing stall-owners for infringing government price controls and engaging in black-marketeering of scarce commodities. The League responded in turn by reminding the government of its vulnerability by boycotting UNIP meetings. Thus UNIP women marketeers were used both as scapegoats to explain inflation, price-hikes and commodity scarcities, and were called upon to “stamp out

1. Quoted in ‘Keep Up Struggle, KK Tells Women’, *Zambian Woman*, January–March 1995, p. 7.

2. *Zambia Daily Mail*, 11 January 1985.

3. *Times of Zambia*, 11 February 1985; *Zambia Daily Mail*, 13 August 1985.

4. *Times of Zambia*, 18 February 1985.

5. *Zambian Woman*, 2, 1985, p. 7.

6. The anti-heroine (!) of a weekly newspaper column in the 1980s, Aunt Agatha, represented the typical image of a Women's League activist: “the irrepressible fire-brand of the Women's League and prosperous marketer”. Quoted in ‘Kapelwa Musonda on Tuesday’ *Times of Zambia*, 9 June 1987.

profiteering". Whichever was the apportioned role the economic interests of UNIP marketeers remained untouched (Geisler 1987:46).

Indicative of another main arena of interest of the League, which vaguely fed into the government rhetoric on food production, was their often repeated suggestion that urban prostitutes should go back to the rural areas to do something useful and feed the nation!<sup>1</sup> "Urban prostitutes", of course, was a blanket term used since the early 1970s to denote all women who adopted what was interpreted as being Western notions of independence. Particularly suspicious was a "Western" appearance, indicated by the wearing of mini-skirts, hot-pants and wigs, joined over the years by "see-throughs", "make-ups" (sic!), "wetlooks", "perms", "slits" and "other flamboyant fads".<sup>2</sup> All these fashions were held to be the root cause of moral and also economic decay in that they tempted men away from their traditional obligations towards their families, endangered national security, the economy, and generally the well-being of the nation.

Men heartily joined the Women's League chorus. One of them was Fitzpatrik Mukonde who complained in 1985 in a letter to the editor of a local newspaper about the "shameful slits". He described that "when they start walking bare thighs are seen!" and he called on "the people responsible for cultural values" to do something about "this way of dressing".<sup>3</sup> Another male reader suggested that women should be levied for damaging Lusaka's pavements since "the fashionable women who wear high heeled shoes with metal tips" were responsible for the deterioration of the inner city.<sup>4</sup> In December 1986 Isaac Mkandawire clearly stated, what many were led to believe, that "especially the Zambian woman thinks and believes that anything Western is good; that is why we have a lot of terrible things happening".<sup>5</sup>

As self-appointed custodians of morality League members took action. Their members battle against Western dress-styles from the 1970s onward was, of course, not about introducing traditional dress but about the position of women in society. The targets were aware that the talk about women having to wear "traditional" dress meant that they should assume a "traditional" role, because after all in "traditional society women wore almost nothing!"<sup>6</sup> It was rather that League leaders, such as the Copperbelt provincial chairperson in 1982, believed that "working women could have as many as three sugar daddies, one to pay the rent, another to buy a fridge and another one to buy clothes". Women's greedy passions were to blame, not men's desire for young girlfriends.<sup>7</sup> In the same vein young girls and women were blamed for becoming pregnant (and for obtaining abortions), not the men who had impregnated them, even if pregnancies were the result of sexual coercion by superiors as regu-

1. Zeniah Ndhlovu, Executive Secretary of the Women's League quoted in *Sunday Times of Zambia*, 3 March 1986.

2. *Times of Zambia* (Lusaka), 4 February 1988.

3. *Zambia Daily Mail*, 12 November 1985

4. *Times of Zambia*, 9 October 1987.

5. *Zambia Daily Mail*, 20 December 1986.

6. *Times of Zambia*, 29 August 1972, quoted in Schuster, *New Women of Lusaka*, p. 162.

7. *Zambia Daily Mail*, 12 February 1982.

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larly happened in schools and workplaces. Access to contraceptives,<sup>1</sup> which would have offered a reprieve for young women, was also fought as “un-Zambian”. Young women were aware of the double standard, which allocated traditional society to women but left men free to embrace “Western” values.<sup>2</sup>

The remedies against moral decline which were suggested by the League thus targeted women only. The “war” against prostitutes and “unaccompanied women” was one solution, the revival of girl’s initiation ceremonies in the urban setting was another. Women who moved about in the evening without a male escort were presented as prostitutes out to solicit men, because what other reason could a “self-respecting” woman have to be outdoors after dark, when she should be cooking dinner and looking after the children. Police action against alleged prostitutes, proved an effective way of discrediting and harassing progressive women.

The ban on unaccompanied women in hotel and bar premises after dark was first introduced in the early 1970s and it was thereafter periodically revived (Schuster 1979:148–153), such as in 1984, apparently in order to stamp out “immorality amongst young girls” (Geisler 1987:52). When League stalwart Kankassa boldly called for sentences of up to six-months imprisonment for single women found on the street in order to create a society where “the dignity of women is held in high esteem”<sup>3</sup>, the executive secretary of the League, Zeniah Ndlovu, had to intervene on account of the fact that this would contravene basic human rights guaranteed in the constitution.<sup>4</sup> By then one of the women who had been arrested as a supposed ‘loitering’ prostitute, turned out to be a respected (married) Zambian academic and gender rights activist, who did not keep quiet over the incident (Longwe 1985). In other instances the League leadership had condoned kangaroo court mob actions against young women found guilty of having contravened the moral standards set by the League. As the result of one such happening where a girl had been hosed down with cold water for allegedly having spent the night in a military camp even the conservative *Zambia Daily Mail* voiced strong criticism.<sup>5</sup>

The revival of girls’ initiation ceremonies in the urban environment had first been proposed by the Women’s League in 1972, when the campaign against prostitutes started. They were clearly related, since what was suggested, also by Kankassa, was the establishment of cultural committees that would teach young women culturally acceptable behaviour and moral rectitude. The suggestion was, perhaps, most clearly indicative of the attempts of the League to migrate the village to town, in order to re-establish traditional values which subordinated young women not only to their husbands but also to older women. Girls’ initiation ceremonies were part of a world where older women were given respect by younger women and were granted authority over their moral conduct. Men colluded with the general idea, since the values inculcated during ini-

1. Contraceptives were legally available only to married women who had the permission of their husbands.
2. *Sunday Times of Zambia*, 22 June 1986.
3. *Zambia Daily Mail*, 18 June 1984 and 5 September 1984.
4. *Zambia Daily Mail*, 18 June 1984; *Zambia Daily Mail*, 5 September 1984; *Times of Zambia*, 16 August 1985.
5. *Zambia Daily Mail*, 27 July 1982.

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tiations were those fostered by men, including women's submissiveness to them. By the 1980s many representatives of the male élite, including members of the church and government, reiterated the call for the revival of "very simple customs which our ancestors found suitable for preparing the good mothers of tomorrow".<sup>1</sup>

But the Women's League was not able to embrace the concept of the initiation ceremonies wholeheartedly. In 1984 and 1985 Women's League conferences in Lusaka called for a ban on the public performance of initiation dances, because they were, perhaps surprisingly, "not portraying any of Zambia's social values"<sup>2</sup> because they were "down to earth erotic (sic), provocative and suggestive".<sup>3</sup> "Waist-wriggling", as the phenomenon was generally called, was, indeed, originally meant to be erotic, in that it imitated the sexual movements during intercourse. These dances were the high point of the initiation ceremonies in villages, where they represented the coveted public display of a young girl's readiness to be married at the end of a period of seclusion.<sup>4</sup>

It was perhaps not surprising that men did not agree with the ban on the public performance of such dances because ultimately they were the intended audience. Men were thus not inclined to forgo the erotic spectacle, even in urban environments on television or in bars. So important was the issue that it entered parliamentary debate in 1985, where a female member, Matilda Kolala, had called for a ban on the dances in public places. She was rebuked by the Speaker for being a "conservative woman who did not seem to accept change".<sup>5</sup> For the older women the initiation ceremonies, which had appeared to be such a good idea for putting young women in their place, had turned into the opposite – an event which, contrary to all intent, had put their sexual qualities on the market.

A new sanitised, urban version of the girls' initiation, the "kitchen party", a hybrid between a bridal shower and a proper initiation, which was popularised by the League through the 1980s, also worked against them. The kitchen party had hoped to avoid the dangers of initiation ceremonies becoming too "traditional", since these affairs were Western style all women gatherings, where ostentatious food, drink and gift-giving were combined with the counselling of a bride-to-be on how to behave towards her husband both sexually and interpersonally. The brides were kept in seclusion for a few days and they were expected to demonstrate their skills by "wriggling their waists" for the benefit of the older women only. This urban version appealed to the middle class aspirations of League members, got young women under their authority and removed supposedly immoral displays from the gaze of men.<sup>6</sup> Yet things were not what they seemed.

1. Kenneth Kaunda, quoted in *Zambia Daily Mail*, 20 September 1983.

2. *Times of Zambia*, 28 May 1985.

3. *Zambia Daily Mail*, 18 July 1984.

4. Compare Gisela Geisler, 'Women are women or how to please your husband. Initiation ceremonies and the politics of "tradition" in Southern Africa' in Goddard 2000.

5. *Times of Zambia*, 1 February 1985.

6. *Ibid.* and Hansen 1995:140.

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By 1985 there were frequent calls by the male party establishment to the Women's League to "closely monitor the kitchen parties" because they had become "breeding grounds for broken marriages". But far from being concerned about the moral decay the parties were allegedly causing, men were worried about the fact that kitchen parties would keep their wives from their domestic duties. Some even went so far as to suggest that the kitchen parties inspired wives to take up prostitution.<sup>1</sup> Behind the ire of men was the fear that their wives might have too good a time, drinking, socialising and plotting with other women. It was a serious problem, since African urban middle class women were, due to their status, relatively isolated from other women, adding to their vulnerability. Indeed, kitchen party fans publicly defended the institution as enabling "a lot of housewives to relax in an unrestrained atmosphere in the company of fellow women" (Kayamba 1987).

Intent on defending the social space they had created for themselves, Women's League members claimed that it was young unmarried women who had destroyed the sense of moral direction of these parties. They apparently attended the parties only to get drunk and engage in "confrontations and show-downs with wives of their married boyfriends out of frustration resulting from desperation for marriage". There were also claims that the presence of single women at such gathering would increase the incidence of "marriage break-ups resulting in single women grabbing people's husbands". The presence of single women at such gatherings was declared untraditional, no matter that the kitchen party had only existed in Zambia for a few years,<sup>2</sup> and they were again depicted as destroying "traditions", marriages, and morals.

Respectable married women thus claimed the pleasures of the equivalent of a girl's initiation, where they could show their authority over the bride-to-be and where they could let go. In identifying young "modern" women as responsible for breaking and twisting tradition and destroying family values, they tried to defend both their authority and dignity as older women and their marriages. Lacking authority and power over their husbands, who in their role as "sugar-daddies" squandered their incomes on young girlfriends, they tried to assert their authority in an area they could legitimise with a "tradition" that also offered them a space free of male interference.

Yet it was men who were largely responsible for making young urban women scapegoats and who had called on the Women's League to revive and control first initiation ceremonies and later kitchen parties. Women were blamed for their lack of traditional values and at the same time they were as guardians of that tradition made responsible for stopping "the rot", as the local press invariably called the supposed moral decay through the 1980s. In the urban context recourse to girls' initiations proved a powerful tool for aligning older women with male interests. They offered a seemingly "natural" way to do this by both blaming and dividing women and diverting attention away from the obvious immorality of men, because girls' initiations are about women enticing

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1. Donna Mpengula, 'Planing good kitchen parties', *Zambia Daily Mail*, 15 August 1995; *Times of Zambia*, 26 February 1986.
  2. *Times of Zambia*, 27 November 1984.

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other women to accept the dominance of men. Ultimately the discourse on the immorality of women and the need for girls' initiations offered men the possibility to place the blame firmly on women's shoulders and to claim the right to be immoral themselves. The Women's League was allowed to execute male defined traditions not to put forward their own versions.

The Women's League in Zambia represented a group of women who were intent on maintaining the small privileges granted to them. Their understanding of their role in politics was coloured by the realisation that they were dependent on the appointing authority, almost always men, who would discipline them if they did not toe the line.<sup>1</sup> Because they never seriously sought political power, they were executing policy rather than making it. Even in their role as guardians of morality they were ultimately unable to pursue their own specific goals, because the male establishment could both elevate them as "mothers of the nation" or ridicule them as old-fashioned Mamas of yesterday, according to whatever suited their interest best. In their role as marketeers they were useful both as party supporters and as scapegoats for economic mismanagement. But in this area at least the League could – as the main stronghold of the party, and its official praise-singers – at least manage to serve their own or their constituents' interests to some degree.

In the 1980s that support came to be more and more important for the party, as membership numbers of UNIP generally and of the Women's League in particular fell. The politics of the League had increasingly discredited it not only among professional and young urban women but also among their established constituents. In 1985 in the largely urban Copperbelt Province, which had once been the stronghold of the Women's League, only five per cent of the female population were members, and rural Kasama District could muster a membership of only 321 (Geisler 1987:47). In 1983 Kankassa proudly declared to the press that she and the Women's League leadership had the confidence of President Kaunda, since they had never disappointed or let him down.<sup>2</sup> She probably was right, but the confidence came at the price of having never gained the confidence of the majority of Zambian women, professional or not. By and by the League constituency had come to be identical with that of marketeers only, largely because membership was essential for their own survival.

For many women, and professional women particularly, the Women's League represented the opposite of what they expected of a women's movement. The League's emphasis on pleasing men excluded the questioning of gender relations and the contentment with which UNIP women restricted their political ambitions to the women's wing left no hopes for increasing the recognition of women's concerns in government from within that organisation's ranks. Thus educated women shunned the League and with it formal politics.<sup>3</sup> They also felt shunned by the League and the party, because they felt they "stood little chance

1. Interview with the Chairperson of Women's Affairs, UNIP, Lusaka, 1 February 1994.

2. Chibesa Kankassa in *Zambia Daily Mail*, 11 April 1983.

3. 'Is UNIP for Elite Women?' *Sunday Times of Zambia*, 28 July 1985; 'Elitist women shun the league', *Times of Zambia*, 25 January 1986.

against the uneducated who enjoy unqualified support from the rank and file of UNIP".<sup>1</sup>

And the fact that in the one-party state civil servant careers were also closely tied to party membership<sup>2</sup> largely dispensed with this option for seeking influence too. This included the Women and Development Unit established in the National Commission for Development Planning in the 1980s. The head of the unit was, of course, a Women's League stalwart, who was not chosen for her enlightened view on women's liberation or knowledge of simple WID issues. In any case the position of its head was below the deputy permanent secretary level, giving the unit little influence on policy making.

When in 1991 Lucy Sichone, a Zambian lawyer and human rights activist, joined UNIP after their election defeat to the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) in the first democratic elections since 1968 and was appointed Secretary of the Women's League, she realised nothing had changed with the return to democracy. She had been appointed to the position on her own insistence, hoping that she could influence the overall party policy concerning women, but she found herself relegated to "nurseries and bakeries". She was still expected to merely implement party policy not to make it and any attempts to break through the established barriers were blocked off as undue interference with party routines.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, her successor, Mary Fulano, who had been active in the Women's League since 1961, still defined the role of the League as organising women's clubs and co-operatives and raising funds for the League and the main party.<sup>4</sup> Sichone's bitter conclusion that "when you want to work for the benefit of women, don't try to do it under Women's Affairs" accurately reflected the suspicions of earlier generations of Zambian women, and it also reflected the experiences of women elsewhere in the region.<sup>5</sup>

### **Women's League culture in Botswana:**

#### *Serving the aspirations of husbands and parties*

Botswana has been described as a country where British colonialism has had minimal impact on African culture with Tswana chiefs ruling into the mid-1950s. The political traditions that shaped the multiparty democracy adopted at independence in 1966 were thus largely authoritarian by nature, excluding women, young men and minority groups from meaningful participation, precluding serious opposition to the ruling political élite and thus removed ordinary citizens from direct participation in the political process. As a result Botswana's post-independence political system has been marked by a lack of political competitiveness, and a weak civil society (Molutsi and Holm 1990:323–340).

1. *Ibid.*

2. In 1986 the Women's League had for example embarked on a membership drive in the Copperbelt town of Ndola by barricading office blocks of the council and parastatal companies forcing women workers under threat of being fired to buy UNIP membership cards on the spot. According to District League chairperson Dorothy Chitambala it was considered "just normal that people in those institutions should dedicate themselves to the cause of the party." *Times of Zambia*, 29 January 1986.

3. Interview, Lusaka, 20 January 1994.

4. Interview, Lusaka, 1 February 1994.

5. Interview, Lusaka, 20 January 1994.

With no independence struggle to draw them into political activity, and political culture being biased against them, women did not feature in political parties much at all. An observer suggested in 1979, when women's participation in politics was very low worldwide, that "the proportion of women in Botswana's political élite of elected office holders is derisory".<sup>1</sup> The two major parties up until the 1990s, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) that has been in power since independence in 1965, and the main opposition party, the Botswana National Front (BNF), until 1987 and 1977 respectively, even lacked a women's wing.

Initially the role of the women's wings was assumed after independence by a quasi-non-governmental women's organisation, the Botswana Council of Women (BCW). It was established in 1969 by the British wife of the first president, Ruth Khama, as an organisation largely led by the wives of ministers, parliamentarians and tribal leaders to engage in social welfare activities. The ultimate aim was to teach African women the art of being good housewives. Its members did not classify their activities as being political, and they embraced a quasi-non-partisan position. Its membership and leadership had by 1992 not changed significantly from 1965. Younger members were discouraged from joining by the stalwarts, "who seemed unwilling or uncomfortable to allow new thinking, and indeed new ways of leadership and mobilisation".<sup>2</sup> Although the BCW was non-partisan it was heavily dominated by the BDP, accounting perhaps for the fact that the ruling party never sought to establish its own women's wing until the late 1980s. A survey in 1984/85 correspondingly revealed that the majority of members of women's organisations, the BCW most prominently amongst them, voted for the BDP and 25 per cent were members of that party (Kimble and Molokomme 1985:21).

The lack of women in political party structures at the higher level and the fact that their membership was, if at all, only reflected in women's wings and the BCW was not, however, due to political apathy. The already quoted study of 1985 found that women were as interested as men in voting and they were the most active at the lower levels of the parties. A leading BDP member suggested at the time that:

Women are responsible for the grassroots, concrete work in all organisations... You go to meetings and it is the women there. Men's conception of politics is to go for the leadership, they are interested in positions. At the lower level of offices, secretaries etc. of the organisation it is the women's consistency that keeps the organisation going. (Kimble and Molokomme 1985:11)

The study also found that women who actually stood for office – even though there had not been more than two women ministers in post-independence politics until then – had needed a much longer record of service in the party than did men. The majority who stood for office in the 1985 elections had joined the par-

1. Quoted in Kimble, J. and A. Molokomme 1985.

2. Pony M. Hopkins, Report of the Development Review and evaluation of the BCW Organisation and its Programmes and Projects. SIDA and Worldview International Foundation, Gaborone 1992; Interview with Grace Dambe, 'A woman of her time', *Motswana Woman*, April 1993, p.13.

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ty before 1970, while many men had done so much more recently (Kimble and Molokomme 1985:10).

Women who have been members of the BDP and BNF have confirmed that members of the women's wing of either party were not expected to join the competition for positions that men are engaged in. Traditional ideas, reproduced *ad infinitum* suggested that "leadership is for men", translated by Tswana cattle holder mentality into "cattle are never led by a cow or they fall into a pit", or that "cows never lead the bull".

For Dorcas Magang, wife of a BDP member of parliament since 1979 who had chaired the hearings into the citizenship laws and was accused of serious bias against women (Ohlsen 1993:8), entry into politics was a very typical affair. She explained that until the formation of the women's wing in her husband's constituency in 1988 she was just a card-carrying member of the party. She explained how she became active in her husband's area "I call it my area because I am so involved there now":

I visited the area that day in July 88 just to listen to what the main party was talking about women getting involved. I went not with any intention of getting into any committees or anything. But when the elections came, one woman raised her hand and nominated me and I was not interested at all. I stood up and said: "Look, I believe that people must be nominated because you know them well, how active they can be, how well suited" and I said that I would not stand. The next comment came from another woman who said: "If you are not on, we are also not on." At that point I thought "Oh, perhaps they are these women who have been so involved" because you see in the constituency in the rural areas, the majority of the members are women. Perhaps they are now telling me that they have been supporting my husband for so long and have not seen me come round, and I should get involved now. So I said: "Alright, if you are going to give me the support, I will take it." So my name came on for the chairmanship. The elections came and I was elected chair of the women's wing of that constituency.<sup>1</sup>

She did not like public speaking, however, and saw her role as educating women and running women's programmes, thus showing her engagement. Besides her activity in the Women's League she was, however, also appointed member of the BDP Central Committee.<sup>2</sup>

Another BDP MP also started in the Women's Wing as chairperson of the constituency held by her husband. She moved from the constituency to the national level and was elected deputy secretary general of the Wing. She had aimed for the top position, the national chairman, mobilising women in the region her husband's constituency belongs to. "Whenever I feel that women are a little bit quiet I go in, you know, and sort of try and wake them up". Even though she also believed that women should have the numerical strength to vote women into main wing positions, she wanted to stick with the women's wing. In her husband's constituency she had acted as an agent blocking the opposition and mobilising the women. Competing with her husband, even though possible in her mind, remained a theoretical idea only.<sup>3</sup>

1. Interview, Gaborone, 5 July 1994.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Interview, Gaborone, 7 January 1994.

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The stories of these BDP women's entry into the restricted space of women's wing party politics are typical of Botswana. Motsei Madisa, an executive of the BNF and a gender activist, has suggested that husband-wife teams were very common in Botswana politics, in that it was almost automatic that the wife becomes the leader of the women's section in her husband's constituency, not because she is the best person to do the job, but because she is the wife.<sup>1</sup>

Clara Ohlsen, now a gender activist in the NGO sector and the editor of a local newspaper, was one of the few women who managed to enter parliament before the 1990s. As a member of the BDP executive she was instrumental in initiating the BDP Women's Wing "because I felt that we needed a forum where we could discuss... issues as women in the BDP". The need for a separate forum arose in her mind when the citizenship law that later would become the cornerstone of NGO activism was passed. But she found that "when it came to discussing issues that were pertinent, we got a hostile reception". She, perhaps, got a more hostile reception than others because fellow women also opposed her

... the people who started complaining were the women themselves. Minister's wives, MPs' wives. They saw us as rocking the boat. I suppose they felt threatened because they were in the movement because of the virtue of their being wives not by virtue of being persons in their own right. They are, but they did not perceive of it like that. I was perceived to be a troublemaker.<sup>2</sup>

Ohlsen admitted that she did not enter politics as a gender conscious person, but her gender consciousness grew as she worked her way up the BDP executive ladder and she realised the impact laws passed during her term of office had even on her own life. Her critical attitude eventually branded her as "that woman" in the party

... but I did not know how deep the animosity went until I got dropped from parliament at the next elections. No explanations – and I did seek them. They had nominated me, I had stood for elections, nominations, and they accepted me. In the second procedure, the chairman of the party, the number two man, went to campaign against me, so I had no chance whatsoever. And I knew it was not because of my inability to do my job – on the contrary. If anything, it could only have been my activities...<sup>3</sup>

There are women who have since missed her progressive and bold voice in the women's wing, but in her own view it turned out just a place to

... fund-raise, to mobilise at the grassroots level, to support party activities, like cooking at conferences, like singing in the choir, like turning up for political meetings and cheering the men on. Yes, a supportive role.

In fact, the BDP women's section did not have its own constitution, and, ironically, the president of the party (and the country) was also the president of the women's section.

Part of the problem, suggests Madisa, was that up until the mid-1990s none of the political parties with women's sections had policies on women. The ruling BDP, for example, emphasised interest in safeguarding individual rather than

1. Interview, Gaborone, 8 July 1994.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

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group rights. In his opening speech to the 1984 National Conference for Women in Botswana, organised by the Women's Affairs Unit, President Ketumile Masire left no doubt about his attitude towards women in politics as defined as an extension of their domestic role when he commended women for the "valuable contribution they make in voluntary work" and congratulated their members for serving "as rallying points ... for public health education, home economics and other public activities".<sup>1</sup> The former associate of Masire, Ohlsen, has mocked in the early 1990s that the BDP had eroded rather than promoted women's rights (Ohlsen 1993:8).

Despite her prominent position in the BNF Madisa had never attended a BNF Women's Section meeting: "I am not going to abandon my child to go there!":

I asked myself... what is the purpose of the women's league? How do they perceive themselves (sic). They should be having a role, they should have a programme. There should be a programme within the party which addresses issues concerning women, if you want to have a women's wing. But it does not necessarily mean that because you have a women's wing you are having women's issues, because if the party does not have a policy on women then I find it also difficult to have a women's wing. What are they going to do?

It is just sidelining them, so in the end they have no role. We should get rid of it, it serves no purpose... They totally have no role... They have no role but to support and fund-raise for the party. Because when it comes to fund-raising they are there... they are the ones that actually make sure that there are some funds coming into the party. (Ohlsen 1993:8)

She recalled how the women in the BNF raised funds for new party offices, and then, when the offices were built, they handed them over to the main party, and did not keep one office for themselves: "It is not that the men came and occupied the office, no, they were actually given that office. And that is how we present ourselves, they were given." The deep irony for Madisa is that "we do sing for these men and praise them and after praising them we even give them the money..." (Ohlsen 1993:8).

For Dorcas Magang, who has straddled both main party and women's section positions, doubt has also crept in about whether the separate space for women was really necessary:

I do not know what was at the back of the mind of the party when they decided, apart from the fact that perhaps they were thinking here is a party and women tend to stay in the background, perhaps we should give them a part to play separately but within the party. But when we look at our constituency for instance, I really find that there is no need to have a women's wing, because the majority of the members are women. Perhaps one of the reasons is that if we are having a women's wing, we are seen to be giving to women real power where they can decide within the party in their own area. Or that they are likely to come forward, because in the beginning where you take a party situation, where we are party members irrespective of whether you are women or what, you find that a lot of women especially in the rural areas when they get elected or when they are nominated they say: "My husband does not like me to play an active part." Otherwise you find that to have a women's wing and then a party it is not necessary. Perhaps eventually when congress decides, when people realise, really what the point is of a women's wing, let's have a party because women are in the majority you might as well have just a party.<sup>2</sup>

1. Quoted in Republic of Botswana, Report on the National Conference for Women in Botswana – Strategies for Change. April, 1984. Ministry of Home Affairs, Women's Affairs Unit. Gaborone, 1984.
2. Interview, Gaborone, 5 July 1994.

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One reason why women's wings are so tenacious in Botswana has been the tendency of women to stick to the boundaries set for them by the party bosses and not try to move beyond into positions of the main wing. Yet, the constitution of the BDP, does not bar women from entering politics: "If you are a card carrying member of the BDP you can stand for any election."<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps ironic that in the women's wing women have to vote for women "if they like it or not".<sup>2</sup> What such comments imply is that women refuse to nominate and vote for women in the main wing, which is still seen as a place of male leadership only. By implication some critics blame women's wingers for refusing to allow any of their members to rise above them, so to speak. The fact that women who made it in the main party do not have a good relationship with their sisters in the wings would suggest that problems do, indeed, exist.

In Botswana, where women's participation in politics has been considered even more of a social and cultural problem than elsewhere, perhaps many women do not dare take the step from quasi-apolitical pursuits of the women's section to the "frying pan of politics". But there are also women who fail or refuse to gain the support of the league members, "singing and fund-raising their way up the women's league ladder". The fact that many of the women who reached the nomination stage in the 1985 elections had been active in the party for 15 years or more would indicate that much "singing in choirs" was needed before fellow women support candidates of their own rank and file.

Many aspiring women candidates have also been restricted by their constituencies, where ordinary men and women supported in 1991 the call to reintroduce the flogging of women alleged to have contravened traditional values<sup>3</sup> and where women in mini-skirts have been attacked and stripped naked in public, such as in the capital Gaborone.<sup>4</sup> For Ethiopia Mosinyi, a former BDP official, and leader of the *Lesedi La Botswana* Party, a small minority party that contested the 1994 elections<sup>5</sup> it was very difficult to encourage women in Botswana because of strong patriarchal customs:

Women are tied to men here in Botswana in a number of ways. If they are not married they have a father or an uncle or a brother to authorise the step. If they are married it is the husband. If they are not married an elder brother, somebody, must give authority. Otherwise she is likely to lose some rights, because whatever they own, like cattle, is looked after by an uncle or brother. And they are at the mercy of these people. So they have to please them, for them to hope to get something back from them.<sup>6</sup>

Botswana's political system has not developed the women's league culture of one-party states, like in Zambia, and women politicians, particularly at the national level, owe little to the *chitenge* clad, conservative Mamas that are so typical of others countries, and they do not espouse mythical village-based ideas of womanhood. On the contrary, many of the more prominent members are

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1. Interview, Gaborone, 6 July 1994.
  2. Interview, Gaborone, 5 July 1994.
  3. 'Customary Court Advocates Women's Flogging', *Midweek Sun*, 30 January 1991, p. 5.
  4. Reports in *The Guardian*, 25 January 1991, p. 4; *The Gazette*, 22 April 1992.
  5. The Party only got a total national vote of 230 (personal communication, 24 October 1994).
  6. Interview, Gaborone, 2 July 1994.

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well-off businesswomen in their own right, who wear suits rather than party-colours. But they have, with few exceptions, nonetheless been unwilling or unable to initiate gender equity concerns within their respective parties. The majority has not aspired to raising issues that might go against the interests of men – often their husbands – and rural authorities. They also have been trapped by their wish to not jeopardise their positions, and the close ties to their husbands in political life have doubly re-enforced an extension of domestic values and uncritical allegiance to male gender biases in the political domain.

The conservative, authoritarian nature of the political élite and what Athalia Molokomme has called a “paternalistic democracy”,<sup>1</sup> has made possible delays in passing a gender policy. The record of the government has been one that has enacted laws that entrench rather than narrowed gender inequalities, giving reason to progressive professional women to remain in the NGO sector. That lobbying from within the NGOs has had some effect was demonstrated in the 1994 elections. The manifesto of the BNF not only included a section on “the emancipation of women” but it also adopted a 30 per cent quota for women in all BNF structures (Botswana National Front 1994). Surprisingly, however, the party was not able to field a single woman parliamentary candidate and it never had done so. Yet the 1994 elections clearly indicated a change of attitude on the part of political parties.

The 1999 elections did, in fact, bring in significant changes in women’s political representation, even though the ruling BDP had applied no quota. Termed in the local newspaper “the year of the women”, the 1999 elections brought into parliament eight women MPs, six elected and two nominated, an increase from 9 to 18 per cent. In addition two women each were appointed to ministerial and assistant ministerial positions. President Festus Mogae did, however, not take the opportunity to appoint one of the three gender activists nominated for special seats by the defeated BNF.<sup>2</sup> And Batswana men were soon heard complaining that “eight women were surely too much”.<sup>3</sup>

**The ZANU(PF) Women’s League:  
“Airport Women”**

Looking at women’s role in the post-independence politics of his country, Zimbabwean writer Chenjerai Hove has charged that:

The only political pain I have is to see the women of my country in politics not as serious politicians, but as dancers, praise singers to the glory of the male politicians. They sing and dance, they kneel and make offerings in the manner of the traditional women of the village, paying homage to the glory of man...

He has described the familiar sight at the airport with Mamas draped in party colours welcoming dignitaries regardless of the time, “off the edge of the long red carpet, singing themselves hoarse, apparently happy to be onlookers in their own destiny” (Hove 1994:35). His observations represent the stereotypical

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1. Quoted in Makan 1997:84.

2. ‘The year 1999 may well be remembered as the year of the women’, *The Gazette*, 27 October 1999, p. 5.

3. Personal information, 11 November 1999.

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image of the ruling party's women's wing, which I have already described for the 1970s and 1980s in Zambia. But here it has occurred in a country that emerged from a Marxist inspired liberation struggle in which women were also risking and losing their lives as guerrilla fighters. It has occurred in a country where the leadership of the liberation movement embraced gender equality as one of its goals, and a country whose government, in response to such promises, established after independence in 1980 one of the first Ministries of Women's Affairs in the region.

Despite these differences and the fact that the Zimbabwean government enacted a number of laws and bills which significantly improved the legal standing of women, the ZANU(PF) Women's League has represented even through the 1990s a conservative image not unlike that of the UNIP Women's League described earlier. This suggests, perhaps surprisingly, that, as was the case in Zambia, the membership of the ZANU(PF) Women's League has been largely made up of older conservative women, even though many of the women who were active in the struggle for independence either as fighters or as *chimbwidos* were very young and often controversial and progressive.

*Chimbwidos* and female guerrillas had experienced prejudice after independence, because they had flouted traditional sexual behaviour patterns in their close association with men. The war situation had supposedly turned them into prostitutes and undesirable "male" woman. They had indeed perhaps been most substantially changed in the war but they did not appear in the pictures accompanying a booklet at the 1984 first ZANU(PF) Women's League Conference in independent Zimbabwe. Instead row upon row of elderly women clad in party colours with the president prominently displayed on their garments were visible. Between the inauguration of the Department of Women's Affairs in exile in 1977 and that first conference of the Women's League, its mandate had swiftly moved from military objectives to social welfare and party mobilisation, adjunctive to the main party, "because actually they have transferred the role of the kitchen to the Women's League".<sup>1</sup> As elsewhere women in the party were after independence important as voters only (Frese-Weghöft 1991:176) and they have been limited to attending rallies and other meetings and being mobilised for demonstrations and activities" (Chimedza 1995:97).

The ZANU(PF) election manifesto of 1980 had promised that "under a ZANU(PF) Government women will enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of political, economic, cultural and family life".<sup>2</sup> Yet, the Secretary of the Women's League, Teurai Ropa Nhongo<sup>3</sup> complained at the 1984 conference that four years after independence major areas of gender inequality had been left untouched and she charged that "this conference must ask what the government is waiting for when our party's socialist policy has spelt out the stand on women?"<sup>4</sup> For the president of the party and the government, Robert Mugabe,

1. Interview with woman Member of Parliament, Harare, 18 February 1994.

2. Quoted in Zimbabwe African National Union, *Speeches and Documents of the First ZANU(PF) Women's League Conference. Zimbabwe, Harare, National Sports Centre, 15-17 March 1984*, p. 15.

3. She later called herself Joyce Mujuru.

4. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 15.

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women were, however, important for the party as its “lifeblood”, “physical foundation” and “home”. As many other African leaders had done before him, he defined the value of women as mothers only:

How can we fail to respect and revere you, when in you we have the womb that conceives the child, the breast that feeds him, the hand that toils to clean, soothe, rear and cook for him; the lap that rests and lulls him; the back that bears him; a mind that is forever concerned about him? This is the view we should all have of our mothers. This is the view society should have of its women so that its women can acquire a special place in that society. ZANU has that view!<sup>1</sup>

The special place he and the party had in mind did apparently not include political representation, either at the national or local level. During the first term of office of parliament between 1980 and 1985 only 11 out of 150 parliamentarians and senators were women (Chimedza 1995:102). Since then the number of women parliamentarians increased to 17 in 1991, including 5 women appointments to reserved seats and increased further to 22, or 15 per cent in the 1996 parliament. Even bleaker was the record of women in ministerial positions, which until 1995 never exceeded one and only in 1998 increased to a record six or 24 per cent (Tichagwa and Maramba 1998:39–40). Local government has not proven to be more accessible to women candidates either. In the 1981 district council elections women made up only 22 of a total of 1182 councillors (Chimedza 1995), in 1994 only five of the councillors were allegedly women<sup>2</sup> and in 1999 the proportion had increased to 38 only out of 1377.<sup>3</sup>

One of the reasons for this, a woman deputy minister explained, was that at independence:

We did not put our act together, we should have really tried hard, because it is much better to push what you want during the transitional period, before you are starting, before people get used to certain ways, when you still had that fever of victory, of searching for something new, something new you have been fighting for so many years. And that is where I think we should have pushed for a quota system, and I think that our South African sisters learned from our situation as well. ...In our case, we did not know, we were just excited about being independent and we really did not know that we should fight hard for us to be involved in decision making. We thought that we fought, that we won, and that is it.<sup>4</sup>

She suggested that unlike in South Africa the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe was conducted mainly in rural areas isolating the educated elite from the struggle and barring their representatives from post-independence power sharing:

With us the war was in the rural areas and the educated elite was isolated during the struggle. That is why it took a long time for the very educated women now to appear in the structures of the party. The educated women were somehow left out... It took a long time for the educated women to get themselves involved, unlike the South African sisters. In South Africa you see that the educated women are the leaders. With us it has taken a long time to have educated women leaders, and for them to push issues along.

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1. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 8.
  2. Interview with Oppah Rusesha, Deputy Minister of Environment, Harare, 16 February 1994.
  3. *The Herald*, 21 January 1999.
  4. Interview, woman cabinet member, Harare 21 July 1995.

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And now, when they try to come now, people have that thing that they are coming for positions. They are suspicious of that and this is a problem. ... We need educated people, but they must put themselves forward, be committed, because politics is about the party, so people must be sure that they are party people. Because a lot of the intellectual women were not strongly into party structure, not active in the party. You must be tried and tested in the party...you must have allegiance to the party, not just because you have got a Ph.D. you just come and get the greatest job.<sup>1</sup>

These feelings are mirrored by younger professional women who have maintained that the Women's League leadership had clearly indicated that they were not interested in their participation. And starting at the cell or branch level to work one's way up has been unacceptable to many:

You sit in the grass somewhere and there is a lot of chanting going on, while you knit quietly. Then comes a party youth, whose mother you could be, prods you and shouts that you are not here to knit, but to dance and sing. These things are hard to take.<sup>2</sup>

If educated women have been missing from the leadership of the Women's League, so have ex-combatants. With a few prominent exceptions, alleged to have had "top connections" women combatants kept a low profile in politics because, explained one ex-combatant:

I was frustrated because when we returned we expected too much yet there was very little for us. We found it hard to start from where we had left. I had left the country when I was about to start Form One.<sup>3</sup>

Her rejection of the Women's League was based on the contention that the creation of the wing was contrary to ZANU(PF)'s equality policy: "The creation of the Women's League was discriminatory, if there was equality then that would not have been necessary."<sup>4</sup> Another ex-combatant recalled that she and others felt insulted when party officials advised them after independence to apply for and buy party membership cards: "we believed that we merited life membership by virtue of having fought...Once people know that you are an ex-combatant, they immediately start to work against you, because they fear us and see us as a challenge to their positions."<sup>5</sup>

Many women politicians themselves have recognised the Women's League as a "mere tank of complaining women voters for the party"<sup>6</sup> where women themselves reinforce the supportive role assigned to them by fundraising, mobilising, doing party propaganda, and by participating in rallies "which men rather watch on the television".<sup>7</sup> It thus seemed "that the wing is there to marginalise us even more":

Because should you wish to bring something to the table [of the main wing] they tell you: "Oh, but that is a women's thing." But if it is like that, a non-decision making machinery,

1. *Ibid.*

2. Interview with Women's League member, Harare, 17 February 1994.

3. 'Now back into active politics, Irene Zindi tells her story...', *The Herald*, 19 April 1995.

4. Quoted in Mafundika 1997:8.

5. Comrade Svinurayi quoted in 'What Female Comrades Say', *Zimbabwe Woman*, September 1987, p. 22.

6. Interview, Harare, 18 February 1994.

7. Interview with woman deputy minister, Harare, 21 July 1995.

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we might as well not have it. ... The Women's Wing is still misunderstood to mean that you do not get involved.<sup>1</sup>

Any involvement that did happen, such as in League sponsored development projects, was oriented towards women's roles as wives and mothers unlikely to threaten the status quo. The League's Kubatsirana Training Centre specialised in nutrition, baking and gardening courses, and the League ran nursery schools, craft shops and literacy classes.<sup>2</sup> The 1981 report of the Zimbabwe Women's Bureau, a Harare based NGO concerned with rural women, suggested, moreover, that rural women were not keen to join the women's wings of the two main parties because they "did not have the resources which would enable them to get involved in practical problems", and that women were unwilling to risk being divided along political lines in their efforts to improve their situation. Instead they demanded to be represented in the leadership of local organisations "that are not only for women" (Zimbabwe Women's Bureau 1981:17).

Some observers have suggested that Women's League members were kept in a state of ignorance by the party in order to thwart their potential influence.<sup>3</sup> This and the alleged selection of leaders in the League according to the "less educated more loyal" formula made its members even more powerless and further foreclosed the participation of more progressive women.<sup>4</sup> For independent MP Margaret Dongo, who left ZANU(PF) and moved on to head an opposition party, patronage has a price.

The fee is allegiance. Once someone pulls you up, you have to pay for it. This kind of women's advancement means that women who benefit in this way are accountable to the men who put them there. Because you have the position and you want to maintain it, you are more likely to let down the constituency.<sup>5</sup>

Dongo, who has never been a member of the League, and who believed that she was elected into parliament as a ZANU(PF) candidate "by women but not by the Women's League" liked to lament the cruelty with which members of the Women's League are used, and deliberately left ignorant:

When I went to war I wanted to improve the life of our parents. I was 15, I was a baby... And today those old ladies [I fought for] wake up at five [in the morning] to go to the airport and support our government. They go there and spend all hours standing, they come back to their township. She has no employment, the husband is not working, the kids are not going to school, and that woman is going to support the nation. She comes back [to the dirt in the township], she goes to the marketeers to get vegetables to sell. The next thing is, she displays them on the road, which is illegal according to our law, and the police come and take those vegetables. And that woman was dancing at the airport!!! What I am saying is, that is cruel, because she has actually promoted you to where you are.<sup>6</sup>

Former Women's League functionary Sarah Kachingwe has agreed with this analysis: "When they are told to sing and make a sound like an army, they will

1. Interview with woman deputy minister, Harare, 17 February 1994.
2. *Herald*, 16 March 1984.
3. Interview, Harare, 18 February 1994.
4. Interview, Harare, 18 February 1994.
5. Quoted in Mumba 1997:5.
6. *Ibid.* and interview, Harare, 18 February 1994.

do so. [But] when this has been done the question will be how do we share the benefits of that singing?"<sup>1</sup>

The influence the male bureaucracy has had over the Women's League has been substantial. Participants of the 1984 National Women's League Conference not only displayed the picture of Robert Mugabe on their garments, but they also entertained with choirs while waiting to hear their leader open the proceedings with innumerable directives and admonishments. A representative of the League eagerly promised him after his long speech that "the directions you have given us ...are carried out. We will support all the proposals that you have given us today" (Zimbabwe African National Union 1984:6–11, and 13). And Comrade Muzenda, a senior male politician who directed the election of the League executive then, suggested to the membership that the League elect "fearless tribunes of Women's cause, but not rivals of menfolk (sic)". He alleged that "to choose misdirected and divisive feminists is to negate the very purpose of the existence of the Women's League".<sup>2</sup>

During the next National Women's League Conference, in 1987, Mugabe simply suspended elections for the national executive and appointed the women he favoured to the leadership himself. This included his wife, Sally Mugabe, as secretary, and it excluded Teurai Ropa Nhonga, who had held the position of head of the women's section since its inception in 1967, as well as other popular leaders. Observers did not believe that the appointment was a way of uniting ZANU and ZAPU women as was claimed, but a strategy to raise his wife's status which had been eroded by a number of scandals connecting her to criminal activities<sup>3</sup> and to tie the League closer to the party. For Kwanele Ona Jirira it was doubtful if the women's protest at "what they felt was a virtual 'foisting' of certain undesirable personalities on strategic league posts" had helped create the "unified mammoth monolithic Women's League" of Mugabe's and Joshua Nkomo's imagination (Jirira 1990).

In 1994 the Women's League was still described as mainly engaging in "knee bending receptions at the airport". Amy Tsanga, an executive member of the human rights organisation ZimRights, suggested that "the Women's League has failed to play a meaningful role other than performing cultural dances".<sup>4</sup> Grace Mugabe, the then new young wife of the president, was said to have felt pity whenever she saw its members [perform].<sup>5</sup> Yet, the League secretary of information and publicity, Nyasha Chikwinya, who was also an MP, nonetheless maintained at the same time that her organisation was very powerful and that "whoever wants to alienate it from national politics will be committing political suicide".<sup>6</sup>

1. Quoted in Mumba 1997: 5.

2. Quoted in Zimbabwe African National Union 1984:28.

3. Personal information, between 1994 and 1995.

4. *The Herald*, 11 July 1994.

5. 'No regrets wearing Mugabe's portrait: Chikwinya', *Zimbabwe Independent*, 10 September 1999. Her scorn is perhaps not surprising, given that she enjoyed the secret attentions of Robert Mugabe as his unofficial second wife, while Sally was singing his praise dressed in party colours.

6. *Ibid.*

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Five years later the male party leadership used another Women's League Conference to gain support for their own candidacy at the general ZANU(PF) conference three months later.<sup>1</sup> The task of the men was made easier by the alleged power struggle between various factions of the League, representing the "educated and affluent", the current leadership and those pitted against the educated.<sup>2</sup> However, if men were able to test their popularity during women's wing elections, and lobbied for the women's vote later in the year, women did not gain any concessions beyond their restricted league positions.<sup>3</sup>

Women's League members had been discussing a quota for women ahead of the 1999 ZANU(PF) party congress and they demanded that one of the four top positions in the party should be reserved for one of their members. The government had earlier that year introduced a 25 per cent quota for local government elections,<sup>4</sup> but the party leadership was not willing to sacrifice top party positions to women, even though promises to that effect had been made as far back as 1997. League members had been lobbying for the position of vice-president of the party, but even though they threatened to boycott the congress if their demand was not met, they came away without a position.<sup>5</sup> The boycott, moreover, was thwarted by the party over threats of disciplinary action against the alleged instigators. Commenting on the issue the *Standard* suggested that the League was, anyhow, not unanimous because "some executive members are content to continue taking orders from the politburo", blocking the minority who apparently felt that it was "time that women were recognised for the role they played during the armed struggle by being offered some of the most senior positions in the party".<sup>6</sup> The events indicated that men still knew how to use and abuse the members of the women's wing, even if member Mavis Chidzongo believed that the organisation had changed on account of "graduates amongst our members".<sup>7</sup>

The educational standards of Women's League members might have improved over time, but what apparently mattered more to Mugabe were the declining moral standards of members, because he complained none of the League executive members elected in 1999 were married.<sup>8</sup> Nothing, in other words, had changed in the 23 years of its existence to bring the ZANU(PF) Woman's League closer to decision and policy making. Chenjerai Hove's hope in 1990, that "ten years of women in our national politics, ten years of singing and dancing, ten years of ululations" would be followed by "ten years of real dance, more for the heart and the emotions, this time by men, in praise of

1. 'Political intrigue at Zanu PF women's meeting', *Zimbabwe Independent*, 27 August 1999.
2. 'Zanu PF women's league splits', *Zimbabwe Standard*, 18 July 1999.
3. 'Political intrigue at Zanu PF women's meeting', *Zimbabwe Independent*, 27 August 1999.
4. *Sunday Mail*, 20 December 1998.
5. 'Women's League Threatens to Boycott Congress', *Zimbabwe Independent* 19 November 1999; 'Zanu PF abandons Lesabe', *Zimbabwe Independent*, 17 December 1999, 'Zimbabwe Women excluded from top posts in ruling party', *Inter-Press Service*, 14 December 1999.
6. 'Chiwinya in Hot Water over Boycott', *The Standard*, 5 December 1999.
7. 'Zimbabwe Women excluded', *Inter-Press Service*, 14 December 1999.
8. *Zimbabwe Independent*, 10 September 1999.

women” did not come to pass. Thus it seems that Zimbabwean women have, as he predicted, “remained of politics, not in politics” (Hove 1994:37).

### The “mass movement of women” versus autonomous women’s organisations

In Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana the women’s wings of ruling parties aspired to be mass movements, but their members never managed to co-opt autonomous women’s organisations, so that in all three countries women’s wings of political parties coexisted with autonomous women’s organisations, the former the home of conservative women the latter of professional and progressive women. In Tanzania and Kenya, by contrast, the one-party state structures succeeded in creating broad based national women’s organisations that in theory were independent, in practice operated like the women’s wing of the ruling party. In both cases the interference of party/government retarded and stunted the development of autonomous women’s movements until the 1990s with the return to democratic multiparty forms of government. In Mozambique the women’s wing of the ruling party OMM separated from the party but was never able to turn into a mass movement of women.

In Tanzania, the Umoja wa Wanawake wa Tanzania (UWT) was formed in 1962 on the orders of the president Julius Nyerere. Bibi Titi Mohamed, the first secretary of the organisation, recalled that “His Excellency said that all the women’s groups in Tanganyika should be dissolved – the YWCA, the Tanganyika Council of Women... – to merge into one national women’s organisation” (Geiger 1997:165, 191). Its functions were broader than those of the TANU Women’s Section (Geiger 1982:49), the women’s wing of the ruling party. Although nominally autonomous it effectively operated as a party wing, national government machinery and women’s movement rolled into one (Geiger 1982:166). The activities of the organisation remained within the traditional WID field and its members curtailed women’s independent access to political office, which instead was ruled by quota systems for appointed MPs only.<sup>1</sup> These measures ensured that women were not elected to parliament on a constituency basis and they remained dependent on the ruling party for appointments.<sup>2</sup> If UWT intended to replace all other women’s organisations, it never aspired to represent the interests of all women. Not surprisingly the organisation was dominated by elderly conservative women with lower educational attainment, who alienated young and professional women, and groomed the wives of prominent male politicians, including the wife of the president himself, as leaders (Geiger 1997:189, 192). Moreover, government legislation ensured that the space of independent women’s organisations was inhibited.<sup>3</sup> The opportunity

1. The United Republic of Tanzania, *Women and Men in Tanzania*. Bureau of Statistics, Dar es Salaam, 1997, pp. 44 and 45; Mukangara and Koda, 1997:35.

2. Quoted in Maken 1997:82 and 83.

3. See for example Tanzania Gender Networking Programme, *Gender Networking Programme*, Dar es Salaam 1993, p. 79.

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spaces of independent women only improved in the mid-1990s but not enough to allow them independent political representation.

In Kenya the ruling party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU), successfully co-opted the national women's organisation Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYWO), a national women's organisation dating back to the colonial era, as a part of KANU when Kenya turned into a one-party state in 1969. In Audrey Whipper's estimation MYWO became part of the means needed by male politicians to "keep women's loyalty, yet dampen their ardour sufficiently to enable them to handle their demands with minimum effort and resources". By 1987 KANU took more direct control (Aubrey 1997:68) assuming the "running of the organisation through women puppets" (Aubrey 1997:73), women who were connected by blood or marriage to the ruling male elite (Whipper 1975:104, 112). The new KANU-MYWO had a large and broad based women's membership spanning national and grassroots levels, attracted many foreign donors' funds, and its more conservative WID oriented approach provided a buffer against more radical feminist women's organisations (Whipper 1975). KANU would thus "capture MYWO organisational finances and MYWO national elected officials would front as agents for KANU to secure foreign donations" and since its elected leaders were "politicians" who desperately aspired to be recognised by KANU men, they would put their own interests over grassroots development and women's interests (Aubrey 1997:144).

The government patronage extended to MYWO "facilitated the disempowering of other women's organisations and leaders that were more militant and consistently supportive of societal and women's interests" as MYWO joined KANU in lambasting progressive women's organisations, such as the Green Belt Movement in the 1980s (Nzomo 1997:241). When Kenya returned to multi-party politics in 1991, KANU severed its connections with MYWO on paper but not in deed, largely in order for MYWO to also qualify for donor funds in a democratic political system.

Even though officially broad-based mass women's movements both UWT and MYWO through their close association with ruling political parties, failed to represent the interests of more than a minority of women, gained no say in policy formulation, and failed to sponsor women for elected political office. In addition they constrained and actively helped the government to curtail the development of independent women's organisations and women's access to political decision-making (Nzomo 1997:242).

In Mozambique, FRELIMO's women's detachment, the Organisation of Mozambican Women (OMM), was in a similar way, though under quite different ideological circumstances, expected to fulfil a broad range of functions similar to those of the UWT and MYWO. Up until 1999, moreover, Mozambique had no national machinery beyond the OMM to represent the interests of women in government. A number of concessions were made to women's interests after independence, such as ensuring that women were represented on lower local decision-making bodies particularly in communal villages<sup>1</sup>, and a few half-

1. In 1977 women made up 28 per cent of local government structures and 12 per cent of national ones, quoted in Hanlon 1994:152.

hearted legal reforms. FRELIMO officials were also no longer allowed to officially enter polygamous marriages, sexual harassment was punished, and initiation ceremonies, *lobola*, and child-marriage were discouraged in official discourse (Hanlon 1994:152 ff). Yet these came at the price of a very conservative vision of the family inspired by Christianity, which condemned not only polygamy but also contraceptives, adultery, and pre-marital sex, and took a dim view of women being anything but under their husbands' authority in the home (Arnfred 1988:11). In fact, the party took a particularly hostile view of women who defied marriage and lived on their own or with their children branding them as being immoral (Hanlon 1994:163).<sup>1</sup>

These double standards, which have been interpreted as the socialist failure to move women's emancipation beyond the labour market and education into the family was also reflected in the paternalistic view FRELIMO held towards OMM. The objectives of the organisation included the mobilisation of women "according to the directives of the FRELIMO party, which directs the activities of the OMM and its members", the "protection of motherhood", and the promotion of the development of women.<sup>2</sup> Initially OMM had no great policy say within FRELIMO, had very few funds, mostly from external donors, and was very conventional in its approach. Apart from literacy programmes OMM was engaged in childcare, social work, mobilisation of women for collective work, and courses in sewing and soap-making. Commercial ventures included hair-dressing salons, restaurants, waiting houses for expectant mothers<sup>3</sup> and sewing cooperatives (Isaacman and Stephen 1980:127).

When OMM members did dabble in more challenging issues such as the future of "traditions" deemed to subordinate women, the support of the FRELIMO leadership was lacking. In preparation for its Extraordinary Conference in 1984 OMM engaged in a large participatory research project on the future of customary practices. According to Signe Arnfred, a Danish academic who was at the time an advisor to the OMM, the project acknowledged for the first time in independent Mozambique that gender struggles were necessary to end women's confinement in the family (Arnfred 1988:14). Clearly in reaction to this possible threat to patriarchal values the male party leadership first postponed the conference, and then took over its proceedings. The November 1984 conference of the OMM was described as an affair where men, most prominently the president himself, dominated the podium and the discussions, while women looked on. Only one of five days was given over to group discussions (Arnfred 1988). The conference thus signified a "male gender struggle to regain control". If previously women had been admonished to be leaders of their own emancipation, they were now reminded that men were in charge of women's affairs (Arnfred 1991). Commentators at the time liked to quote the wife of the president, Graça Machel, then a member of the OMM executive and a minister, warning before the 1984 conference that "the party thinks that because it created OMM it can

1. Treatment included forced repatriation in rural areas. Barbara Isaacman and June Stephen, Mozambique: Women, the Law and Agrarian Reform. United Nations, ECA, Addis Ababa 1980, p. 127.
2. Quoted in Hansen et al. 1985:230 and 231.
3. Quoted in *ibid.*

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direct it. So the OMM will have problems when it begins to threaten the privileges of men.”<sup>1</sup>

By the end of the 1980s *lobola* and polygamy were despite party denunciation still widely practised, also among party members (Hanlon 1994:156; Urdang 1984: 28). Unequal gender relations in the household stood the test of time, too, with even FRELIMO officials forbidding their wives to join OMM activities. That FRELIMO commitment to gender equality had a very low threshold was also indicated by the refusal to liberalise the citizenship law, which failed to accord Mozambican citizenship to the children of Mozambican mothers married to foreigners. President Machel believed that women must move with the foreign husband and take his citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Far from just being the concern of a small minority, the citizenship law raised broader issues of male control and female subservience in the household, which have caused similarly strong reactions in other Southern African countries, particularly, as we shall see, in Botswana.

With Mozambique's entry into multi-partyism in 1991 OMM was forced by the party leadership to separate from FRELIMO. President Joachim Chissano declared that the days of mass organisation for FRELIMO were over and he urged OMM members to “grow in quantity and quality” and recruit women regardless of their social position and political affiliation.<sup>3</sup> The new openness towards the main mobilising force of the party had, as in Kenya, perhaps to do with the fact that OMM had in the multiparty climate been increasingly unable to generate funds, either for their own activities or for the party, and was thus entirely dependent on FRELIMO party funds.<sup>4</sup> Another reason why the FRELIMO president might have found it easy to set OMM free was low membership figures: at the time of the separation membership stood at only 176,706, of a total population of 17 million.<sup>5</sup> Without mass membership or fund-raising ability OMM was, apparently, no longer welcome in the party fold.

By 1996 membership of OMM had again increased by an astonishing 500 per cent. But the increase was attributed to low membership fees rather than other women's organisations joining. That “other parties' women's leagues” and independent women's organisations did not affiliate to OMM was no surprise, since the organisation had in the past been accused of “trying to control everything and stopping autonomous women's activities” (Johnsen 1992:175). Its own activities, moreover, had – perhaps due to lack of funds – been restricted to commemorative marches. An OMM training centre in Maputo, for example, had only 57 pupils. Voter education in the run-up to the 1994 general election claimed to have mobilised large numbers of women largely for the benefit of FRELIMO, since OMM had, in the words of its president, “tried, without success, to prove that it was no longer linked to FRELIMO: “Our opening was not understood by the other women, who always claimed we were from Frelimo.”<sup>6</sup>

1. Quoted in Hanlon 1994:147.

2. *Herald* (Harare), 14 November 1984.

3. ‘Mozambican women at the crossroads’, *Mozambique file* (London), January 1991, p. 4.

4. *Ibid.*

5. ‘OMM returns to Frelimo’, *Mozambique file*, August 1996, p. 4.

6. Paulina Mateus, quoted in Johnsen 1992:5.

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Indeed, so strong were the ties with FRELIMO even after 5 years that the 1996 OMM National Congress, apparently spontaneously and without broader consultation, decided to return to the party fold because, the OMM secretary-general explained, “it makes no sense to run away from our father”.<sup>1</sup>

By then, FRELIMO had moved ahead in the matter of women’s participation in decision-making and had instituted a 30 per cent quota for women on all its provincial lists for the 1994 national elections. It was the first such quota in the region which increased women’s participation in parliament to 28 per cent, the highest in Africa at the time.<sup>2</sup> OMM might not even have been involved in the setting up of a Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Social Welfare after the 1999 elections which confirmed FRELIMO’s position in government either, since its members praised the president for having set it up. Other women’s organisations were more cautious in their praise suggesting that this might just be a cosmetic change leaving critical areas of family law, including reproductive rights, discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace and women’s land rights, still untouched.<sup>3</sup>

The creation of the Women’s Ministry in 1999 came at a time when many other countries in Southern Africa had begun to abandon women’s ministries and departments as inefficient national machineries that did not facilitate the mainstreaming of gender into government. Zimbabwe had almost 20 years earlier, in 1981 been the first country to create such a ministry, and had experienced its decline a few years later when the ministry first turned into an extension of the ruling party and its women’s league, then shrank in size and in the early 1990s had turned into a farce of its former intention.

1. ‘OMM returns to Frelimo’, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

2. *Ibid.*

3. ‘Chissano Commended for Creating Women’s Ministry’, *Pan African News Agency (PANA)*, 20 January 2000.

## CHAPTER 5

## Ambitious but Marginalised

### *Women's Desks and Ministries*

The restricted nature of political participation for women opened up through the 1980s with the establishment of national machinery for the advancement of women. Ranging from women's desks over departments to ministries and including statutory bodies outside government, these structures were meant to act as catalysts for the inclusion of women's concerns in government policy and as watchdogs over the implementation of gender equity policies and adherence to international conventions. In the mid-1990s, when gender mainstreaming gained in prominence, national machinery was to coordinate the efforts of line ministries. Located within governments national machinery was often headed by political appointees loyal to the ruling party and/or its women's wing, but they were staffed by civil servants and thus created some space for professional women to apply themselves to acquiring influence within government but outside party politics.

Initially women's national machinery was identified as the most promising possibility to influence government policy implementation from a centralised position. But all too often, the institutions that made up national machinery wielded too little power and expertise to influence and create policy, or to oversee governments, and instead ended up as implementers of government policy and donor agencies. Small government budgets and staff complements and dependency on donor funds led to a piecemeal project approach which brought the machinery into competition with the NGO sector, thus creating tensions.

Relationships between autonomous women's movements and national machinery led to questions being raised regarding the democratic practice of machinery on the one hand and the integrity of the NGOs on the other (Tsikata 2001). In addition, national machinery has often lacked clear guidelines defining functions so that it "could never be expected to implement [them] in the light of their structure and power". Thus "structure, functions and powers of national machinery rarely ever matched" (Tsikata 2001).

Zimbabwe had offered a good example to other countries in the region when a year after independence in 1981, four years before national machinery for women's advancement was endorsed by the UN Decade of Women Conference in Nairobi, the government established a Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs. Initially the work of the ministry was very promising as it quickly moved to successfully push for laws in favour of women, some of which were progressive enough to outdo those in many developed countries. But legal reforms remained isolated from inequalities in the household and divorced

from customary law, leading to retractions of legal gains. The effectiveness of the ministry also declined, as it was downgraded, tied closer to the party and eventually all but immobilised. The fall from prominent test case to obscurity in the space of a decade has been rapid and it has served as a lesson to women's movements in the region.

The Zimbabwean experiences informed the strategies of women in both Namibia and South Africa. In Namibia women rejected a separate women's ministry, opting instead for a small gender desk in the Office of the President. When the desk was shown to have too little influence it was expanded and elevated in terms of institutional status. This strategy, however, never solved the problem of the machinery's close association with the ruling party and its women's wing and the resulting tensions with the NGOs, nor has it increased the capacity of the department to influence government policy.

In South Africa, the form and nature of the national machinery were discussed over a long period resulting in the broadest range of institutions and bodies to protect and promote gender equality in the region. Here, the national machinery has perhaps been more effective, but it came at the price of weakening the autonomous women's movement.

#### **The Rise and Fall of the Zimbabwe Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs**

When the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs (MCDWA) was established shortly after independence hopes were high that this was a sign of the government's willingness to honour pre-independence promises to women. The appointment of prominent ex-combatant and Executive Secretary of the ZANU(PF) Women's League Joyce Mujuru as minister, who had been vocal about women's rights as a freedom fighter, was initially interpreted as an indication that the participation of women in the liberation struggle would be rewarded. The tasks of the MCDWA were defined as to "mobilise, organise, coordinate and monitor public and private non-governmental organisations geared towards closing disparities between men and women in Zimbabwe".<sup>1</sup>

For Mujuru the change from guerrilla commander to minister was difficult. Military training had not prepared her sufficiently for the tasks ahead. In 1995 she recalled:

In 1980 I was blank... and I am very honest. I used to just go to the office and start crying because I just did not know what to do. I was so young, I was only 24 when I was made minister...and you can imagine with very little education and that education had already vanished because we had no books to read to keep our minds fresh.<sup>2</sup>

She was at the time the only female minister in a cabinet of older men, many of them with university education (Seidman 1984:430). It was perhaps for that reason that she was open to consulting with young women academics, even though

1. Quoted in Kazembe 1986:399.

2. Interview, Harare, 19 July 1995.

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they had not been part of struggle. As a result some joined the new ministry as civil servants, others acted as advisors and researchers.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the background of the minister other ex-combatants were not able to join her because civil service positions required educational qualifications which most had not yet acquired after the war.<sup>2</sup> It was also unfortunate that despite the new progressive additions to the ministry, many of the lower level staff were domestic science demonstrators, trained under the old regime, whose experience did not go beyond organizing cooking and nutrition courses. Incidentally they were to be the rural field-workers, since educated women were not interested in joining rural life.<sup>3</sup> It was thus perhaps not without reason that many ex-combatants were initially suspicious of the ministry because it was staffed by bureaucrats and academics who had not been part of the struggle and were held to be either imbued with colonialist ideas (Scott 1989:58) or elitist. Another reason why ex-combatants might have distanced themselves from the new ministry could also have had to do with the fact that the projects set up by the ministry to re-integrate them into civilian life were channelled into fields traditionally reserved for women such as sewing and typing (Seidman 1984:433). Moreover, since the Ministry initially attracted many young professional women as civil servants, relations with the women's league tended to be strained (Chimedza 1995:109).

Apart from the staffing problems the ministry was, from the start, seriously underfunded, receiving in 1983 only one per cent of the national budget, which one year later barely covered the salaries of its staff.<sup>4</sup> Many of its programmes were thus dependent on donor funds and the good will of participants' voluntary work. For Hope Chigudu of the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre, it was on account of donor dependency that the ministry's projects got "stuck at the welfare and access stage":

Donors did not want to deal with the 'hardware' of women's issues and preferred to remain darlings of the government by capitalising on so-called income-generating projects which never generated any income. (Makan 1997:85)

Initially members of the ministry "stressed their belief that only changes in the traditional and colonial vision of women as mothers first would allow full realisation of women's aspirations" and its minister vowed to attack the customs and institutions that kept Zimbabwean women subordinate. This reflected ZANU policy which had promised to "fight against reactionary tendencies" of certain aspects of Zimbabwean culture.<sup>5</sup> But as the attitude of the party and the government to gender equality changed and customs were again preserved, "traditional" values also crept into the speeches and demands of the minister. Mujuru was as head of the ZANU(PF) Women's League limited to party policy,

1. Rudo Gaidzanwa reported that most of the staff of the ministry "were university graduate middle-class black women, who had been educated abroad as well as within Zimbabwe". In 'Bourgeois Theories of Gender and Feminism and Their Shortcomings with Reference to Southern African Countries', Ruth Meena (ed.), *Gender in Southern Africa. Conceptual Issues*. Harare 1992, p. 115.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 431.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Herald*, 22 February 1994.
5. Quoted in Seidman 1984:427.

and the ministry reflected the party's contradictory approach towards women. Progressive women soon discovered that the ministry was an extension of the party and its women's wing, and rural women realised that the ministry was unable to influence policy in favour of the most urgent of their demands, such as being allowed to apply for agricultural plots in their own name in the new resettlement schemes, and gaining access to local decision-making structures (Zimbabwe Women's Bureau 1981:23).

In the first years of its existence the ministry was, however, actively involved in introducing a number of progressive laws. The Legal Age of Majority Act (LAMA), which granted women and men legal majority from the age of 18, was the first and most important piece of legislation to prepare the ground for gender equality. The Labour Relations Act of 1985 abolished discrimination on the basis of sex and introduced three months partially paid maternity leave. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1985 removed the guilt clause from divorce proceedings and recognised women's direct and indirect contribution in the accumulation of property and that it should be equitably distributed at divorce. Added to these were laws which enabled courts to enforce maintenance payments and which equalised tax laws. A new inheritance law<sup>1</sup> changed the customary practice of having only one heir, and opened the way for wives to obtain part of the estate of a deceased husband.<sup>2</sup> The legislation was initially also meant to override customary law,<sup>3</sup> an intention that was made more realistic by the Customary Law and Primary Courts Bill of 1982, which had abolished "tribal" courts and integrated the African customary and civil court system into one (Cutshall 1991).

The Legal Age of Majority Act (LAMA) initially caused jubilation amongst women. The women's ministry, perhaps astonishingly, joined in the jubilation and organised demonstrations to thank the government for the passing of the act, as if it were not part of it. It thus "assigned itself a spectator role reminiscent of women in dependent situations expressing admiration for the man they depend on" (Gaidzanwa 1992:115). The jubilation over the act was not shared by the majority of men as well as many older women, since parents felt that they were losing control over their daughters. A breakdown of morality was feared, but what emerged even more strongly was the loss of financial gains via daughters as *lobola* payments theoretically came to be a matter of the spouses' choice rather than the parents' demands, and guardians could no longer claim seduction damages for their female charges. The latter consequence of LAMA was revealed in a testcase brought before the High Court in 1984, which ruled in favour of girls over 18 being able to claim their own damages if they so wished.<sup>4</sup>

The MCDWA had attacked *lobola* as a "symbol of women's oppression" immediately after independence. In 1983 Mujuru boldly declared that "women

1. The law was announced in 1984 already but was passed only at the end of the decade.
2. Women and the Law in Southern Africa Project, *Maintenance in Zimbabwe*. Harare 1991, p. 5; *The Worker*, November 1997.
3. Note, for example, section 3.3 of the *Legal Age of Majority Act*, that states that the provisions "shall apply for the purpose of any law". Government of Zimbabwe, *Legal Age of Majority Act*. Gazette No. 15, 1982, p. 96.
4. *Herald*, 2 August 1984, 8 September 1984, 11 September 1984.

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no longer tolerated the acceptance of oppressive tradition and custom as an excuse for their oppression.”<sup>1</sup> But male opposition, also from within the government and the party, indicated that such talk was considered “a new form of cultural imperialism” which was bound to destroy African culture (Seidman 1984:433). When the ruling on the seduction damages further inflamed critics, Mujuru and her ministry backed off. Far from condemning the custom she then suggested that *lobola* should be treated as a separate entity from LAMA and its regulations and that it should remain a private arrangement between families.<sup>2</sup> She also assured an audience in rural Mount Darwin that “we want to retain our cultural values” and “our traditional way of life where our young boys and girls had direct parental care” and she urged chiefs to “take part in cultural revival activities” and suggest necessary amendments to LAMA.<sup>3</sup>

Her pronouncements reflected the changing views of President Robert Mugabe. In 1983 he had talked positively about LAMA as preventing fathers or guardians from stopping marriages by insisting on payments,<sup>4</sup> but one year later he publicly claimed that

... he would demand *roora* [*lobola*] for his sister and if the prospective husband did not want to pay and would resent the judgement, he would be asked: “Do you want to marry my sister or not?”<sup>5</sup>

By the end of that year of controversy, Justice Minister Eddison Zvobgo assured Zimbabweans that the “right to claim damages would be reinstated to parents of seduced women”.<sup>6</sup>

Acrimony over LAMA had initially surfaced in attacks on “immoral women”, since the law was supposed to have had negative effects on social cohesion and traditional values. Critics of LAMA tried to prove their case by citing the phenomenon of “baby-dumping” in urban areas, in which young mothers were accused of abandoning newborn babies. Between September 1983 and March 1984 these incidents were magnified by the media into a “baby-bumping campaign” which blamed young urban women not just for being “possessed by the devil” but also blamed them for all manner of social problems (Jacobs and Howard 1987:41). As was the case in Zambia, men, for whom young girlfriends had become prime status symbols alongside good jobs and large cars (Weiss 1986), were absolved from responsibility, because, after all, all young women were “prostitutes”. That the government had consistently denied women control over their fertility by demanding the permission of the husband for obtaining contraceptives and by making abortion a criminal offence,<sup>7</sup> was not addressed.

1. ‘Nhomgo wants real equality’, *Herald*, 16 March 1984.

2. *Herald*, 21 December 1984.

3. *Herald*, 27 November 1984.

4. Quoted in ‘Women and the law – a new twist’, *Moto* (Bulawayo), October 1984.

5. *Herald*, 13 September 1984.

6. *Herald*, 7 and 17 December 1984.

7. Seidman, 1984:433, The *Zimbabwe Standard* estimated in January 2000 that “over 80,000 illegal abortions are carried out annually in the country accounting for about 500 deaths”, 9 January 2000.

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Instead the government embarked on a campaign against “prostitution”, exemplified by the “rounding-up” of thousands of women late in 1983. “Operation clean-up” was presented as a concerted action to rid the cities of prostitutes, beggars and squatters, but far from targeting prostitutes

... women were stopped while walking on the street singly, in groups or with men; in public places like cinemas, at parties and even at home.[...] Students, nurses, married couples, industrial workers, domestic workers, women working in ministries, unemployed women and schoolgirls. They were held in prisons or police station compounds and only released upon presentation of marriage certificates or proof of employment... Women failing the “screening” were sent to a settlement area several kilometres from Mashumbi Pools, in the Zambezi Valley.<sup>1</sup>

The critical church-run magazine *Moto* condemned the campaign as attacking fundamental human rights of women. It charged that the provisions of LAMA were useless if “women are required to carry marriage certificates to avoid detention”, and likened new requirements to “a pass system for women”.<sup>2</sup> Some of the 6,300<sup>3</sup> detained women felt targeted “because they were young, single and showed evidence of earning their living”. The operation was thus interpreted as a move to control women who had apparently made too much use of the law by digressing from their traditional role as dependent wives (Jacobs and Howard 1987:41).

No government ministry or department took direct responsibility for the operation. Justice Minister Zvobgo claimed that it had been a joint decision of the Central Committee of ZANU(PF). MCDWA declared that it was neither informed nor consulted over the matter, a notion confirmed by one of its former research associates (Jacobs 1988:7). Referring to “baby-dumping” and “operation clean-up” Mujuru complained almost two months later that “women were publicly made scapegoats for social evils when men were sometimes equally or more to blame”.<sup>4</sup> But the ministry never publicly condemned the operation at the time, suggesting instead that it would be improper to criticise a government of which it was part. When in 1987 the ministry belatedly issued a statement on the “rounding up of so called prostitutes”, it never – despite the title – moved beyond the assumption that the targeted women were indeed prostitutes, who were in need of income-generation projects, in order to eradicate the underlying reason for their fall from grace, namely poverty.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the attacks on single women in round-ups and incidents of mob justice meted out against women deemed to be dressed too provocatively<sup>6</sup> continued. For Rudo Gaidzanwa “operation clean-up” “signalled the re-domestication of women after a brief

1. ‘Operation Clean-Up’, *Moto*, December 1983/January 1984.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Figure quoted by Weiss 1986:124.

4. *Herald*, 27 January 1984.

5. *Mahogany*, April 1987, p. 9.

6. Attacks on women dressed in mini-skirts or the like at public bus stops are a common feature in Zimbabwe. Male students have frequently attacked fellow female students for what they wear. In 1992 a mob of one hundred students attacked one mini-skirted woman on the University of Zimbabwe campus in Harare. Male students apparently claim the right to control the campus in order to “defend our culture”. The United Bachelors Association which was behind the actions, has been likened to a “fundamentalist police force” engaged in sexual harassment. Lynette A. Jackson, ‘Friday the 13th University of Zimbabwe Mini-Skirt Saga’, *Southern African Political and Economic Monthly*, December 1992/ January 1993, p. 25.

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ideological flirtation with a socialist inspired alternative". Ultimately, for her and other professional Zimbabwean women "the events exposed the dependence of the women's ministry on the party and government on how the rights of women were to be interpreted and effected".<sup>1</sup>

The closeness between the party and the government was already indicated by the fact that the minister responsible for women's affairs was also the head of the ZANU(PF) Women's League. This dual headship suggested that the ministry was, in fact, an extension of the party's women's wing, with the League being assigned the task to politically mobilise women and the ministry to mobilise them for social and economic development. Advocating a one party state system, Mugabe had told the Women's League conference in 1984 that "the party is the creator of policy which the Government implements[...]The view of the party is that the Government should be the executor or implementor (sic!) rather than the architect of national policy".<sup>2</sup>

Eight months later, in November 1984, Mujuru used the opportunity of a workshop on women's rights organised by the legal department of her own ministry to complain about the "delaying tactics that have been adopted" with regard to the passing of certain laws against the discrimination of women, suggesting that "the party and the women felt that the time for such changes is ripe if not overdue". She explained:

My ministry finds itself in a very difficult position with regard to law reforms. Women direct all their queries to my ministry...and my ministry is not in a position to give an accurate answer. [...] My ministry because it does not administer any statute, has no mandate to introduce laws in Parliament, neither can it amend any. All we can do is make recommendations on areas of change to the appropriate ministries who usually take their time in actioning (sic) the requests.<sup>3</sup>

On another occasion earlier that year she had said that:

The constraints on women's advancement in Zimbabwe had partly been due to the lack of co-operation received from other ministries. [...] Attempts to spur Government ministries to action in the cause of women's rights by setting up a women's desk in every ministry resulted in some responding positively but many refused to co-operate.<sup>4</sup>

Mujuru's laments indicated a serious lack of policy making power within MCDWA – women's affairs might have had the status of being a department in a ministry with a minister represented in cabinet, and the top structures of the party, but it nonetheless seemed to have advisory functions only.

It is perhaps interesting to note that initially the ministry seemed to command, if not power, at least sufficient attention or clout to have influence. A former member of the legal department of the ministry, later a prominent figure in the NGO movement, suggested that the department was mandated to scrutinise the law to remove gender imbalances. Its members were consulted about LAMA and managed to defeat the traditionalist lobby in parliament who

1. Gaidzanwa, *Bourgeois Theories*, 1992:117.  
 2. *Herald*, 16 March 1984.  
 3. Quoted in *Herald*, 15 November 1984.  
 4. Reported in *Herald*, 27 January 1984.

opposed it.<sup>1</sup> But the circumstances of “operation clean-up” suggested that in 1984 the ministry was no longer consulted on gender policy issues.

The effects of the new laws, and LAMA in particular, were, moreover, not as widespread as the fierce opposition suggested. Professional urban women were perhaps its main beneficiaries, as the relationship of the new laws to customary law remained unexplored and rural women remained unaware of the existence and implications of these and other laws. Community court officers revealed widespread ignorance about the new laws in general, and presiding officers were faced with the difficult task of applying government law against the wishes and understanding of the people:

Most people don't understand what is happening. They blame us because they do not know what is behind the whole thing. When we explain it to them they are very cross. You see, the government is for the people, the Africans, and they do not understand why customary law is being changed. The most important thing to these people is customary law, and now it is being thrown away by their government. (Cutshall 1991:188)

Presiding officers also stated that only girls “with good salaries will have the courage to marry without parental consent”:

... many women are not bold enough to come here without parental consent, even if they do have the right. Most continue to seek parental consent because they are afraid that should the marriage fail they will have nowhere to go. And their parents will not permit them to get a marriage certificate until *lobolo* has been paid. (Cutshall 1991:195–196)

In the mid-nineties Joyce Mujuru still lamented: “*Lobola* is there – polygamy – even talking about it is promoting it.”<sup>2</sup> It would thus seem as if the opposition to the new laws was theoretical rather than based on a real loss of rights of parents and husbands vis-à-vis their daughters and wives. And keeping to customary law was not a thing for rural areas only – Mugabe himself had been exercising the right to polygamy and customary marriage, belatedly paying *lobola* for his “mistress”.<sup>3</sup>

Disgruntled men, guardians and traditional authorities were not the only opposition the government had to deal with. “Operation clean-up” also spawned women’s rights organisations, whose membership of largely professional women further aggravated public opinion and threatened the party’s idea of a dependent, serviceable mass women’s movement such as the Women’s League represented. The Women’s Action Group (WAG) was initially formed in November 1983 in direct response to “operation clean-up”, in order to document the campaign and to lobby for the release of the detained women. Professional women, who felt targeted by the government, and by implication the ministry, distanced themselves and joined WAG (Watson 1984). They were instantly attacked as being expatriate dominated and patronising, and its members were accused of having ignored and antagonised the ministry and the Women’s League (Makamure 1984). As a result, many of the professional women who had worked for and supported the ministry left and joined the NGO sector

1. Interview, Harare, 8 February 1994.

2. Interview, Harare, 19 July 1995.

3. *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 9 April 1995.

instead. WAG continued to operate with a host of other non-governmental women's organisations and effectively took over some of the tasks of the ministry by trying to hold government accountable to its commitment to gender equality, which only came to be enshrined in the constitution in 1997.

By January 1986 the government, and the ministry, responded to independent women's organisations by proposing a National Council of Women, whose predominantly government appointed members were to act as an umbrella organisation for all women's NGOs. It was to be organised in a structure parallel to the Women's League from the village to the national level under the auspices of the MCDWA. Ironically this proposal, which clearly intended to curtail the activities of women's rights' activists, was presented at a meeting that introduced the progressive Matrimonial Causes Act.

The proposal for the Council again revealed the weakness of the ministry vis-à-vis the party. It was to be directly answerable to the ministry, which in turn was to act as a clearing house for all external funding. The ministry would thus not only command NGO funding but it would also "ensure that member organisations' programmes and actions are in harmony with government aspirations and ambitions". What this meant was explained by the proposed relationship of the council to ZANU(PF):

As a nation that is moving towards a one-party state, I must emphasise the supremacy of the Women's League. The Women's League is the Policy Maker (sic) that gives direction to women's activities and the national women's council and its implementers. The national Council translates the policy directions provided by the Women's League into action. [...] Women League members may be the same members whom the non-governmental organisations elect to represent them on the National Council. It is therefore hoped that a Women's League member through her rightful placement in all of these organisations will be able to win the "unconverted" to the Party and to the Women's League in particular.<sup>1</sup>

The National Women's Council was thus conceptualised as a broader based ZANU(PF) Women's League, which commanded all NGO resources, funding and projects. Projects were anticipated to include "fund raising, marketing and trading activities, banking and running credit schemes". Advocacy for women's rights was not among them.<sup>2</sup> Questions and responses from the floor concerning the planned Council were not entertained at that meeting. Instead tea and cakes were served on the lawn, to colourfully dressed League members and astounded members of the NGOs.<sup>3</sup>

Even though the Council never came to pass the proposal had clearly threatened the autonomy of women's NGOs enough to raise their hackles. Instead the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs was over the years tied even closer to the party, so that its functions all but overlapped with the Women's League. In 1989 when Sally Mugabe, the wife of the president, was appointed Executive Secretary of the Women's League the Department of Women's Affairs in the Ministry was downsized (see Chapter 4), and whole sec-

1. Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs, 'The National Women's Council.' Address by the Honourable Minister of State at a Meeting to discuss the Matrimonial Causes Act, the Draft Succession Bill and the Proposed Women's Council, Belvedere Teachers College, 25 January 1986.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Personal information.

tions were transferred to other ministries. What was left was integrated into a newly established Ministry of Political Affairs. Physically housed in the same building as the ZANU(PF) headquarters, the ministry was mandated to service the mass movements of the party, namely the youth and women's movements. Opposition politician Margaret Dongo critically suggested that the ministry was "to run and sustain the ruling party by disguising party functionaries as civil servants" and by enabling the party "to enjoy free financing from the national fiscus at the expense of other parties".<sup>1</sup> The head of the department, Bridget Mugabe, an eccentric sister of the president, recalled:

We were also the secretariat to the party and people said that it was a ministry for the party. It was, sure!!! That was why it was called Political Affairs. We were doing certain activities for the party. ... The [League] secretariat was doing the same thing...in Political Affairs we were doing it together.<sup>2</sup>

After the reshuffle independent women asked if the change meant that "if one is not in the party one is not represented". "Can one presuppose that by not being in the League one has automatically alienated oneself from any meaningful input into policy formulation?" (Jirira 1990:35)

By 1992 the Ministry of Political Affairs was dissolved and the Department of Women's Affairs was integrated into the new Ministry of National Affairs which replaced Political Affairs, still housed in ZANU(PF) headquarters. Again, during the move, two sections of Women's Affairs were transferred to other Ministries, so that only one section with Bridget Mugabe as head remained. She was the only staff member until two colleagues joined her in 1993. It seemed as if the department continued to exist only on account of her tenacity and her kinship to the president. She certainly "did not want to resign and become somebody in the party secretariat":<sup>3</sup>

They thought: 'Ah, too much work for one', but I said 'No'. I told them that I have a third of the staff that I require. I spoke quite strongly. We ha[d] a new senior minister who took over...so I said to him: Here ... oppression of women in this ministry. You people filled up the Ministry with men, you wanted to destroy the Department of Women's Affairs ... Because the attitudes and the goings on, they would really have led to the destruction of the department. Nobody working for it under government – that would be the end of it. So there would be no budget and no finance for women. <sup>4</sup>

A new position for a Minister of State for Women's Affairs had also been created in the latest move, but she was a political appointee in a civil service cloak who worked in the President's Office as a party official responsible for the ZANU(PF) Women's League.<sup>5</sup> And unlike the former minister of women's affairs the new minister of state was no longer a member of cabinet, but was represented there instead by the president.<sup>6</sup> In 1997 even the government sponsored *Herald* criti-

1. Quoted in Lloyd 1996.  
 2. Interview, Harare, 11 February 1994.  
 3. Interview, Harare, 11 February 1994.  
 4. *Ibid.*  
 5. *Ibid.*  
 6. *Daily Gazette*, 8 March 1994.

cised that the department's "political outlook derived from the ruling ZANU(PF) party influence which excludes, even isolates non-members".<sup>1</sup>

In 1998 the Zimbabwe government belatedly presented its first report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women after finally adopting CEDAW in 1991. Perhaps as a concession to the event a gender desk in the Office of the President headed by a Minister of State in the President's Office responsible for Gender joined the Department of Women's Affairs in the Ministry of National Affairs, Co-operatives and Employment Creation as national machinery. Its task was described as being to streamline gender into government departments and ministries. Considering that the Government of Zimbabwe had sent one of the largest delegations to the UN women's conference in Beijing without having made serious attempts to put in place a gender policy the *Herald* believed that the gender desk, which journalists alleged was not doing any substantive work, was a "kind of face-saver".<sup>2</sup> The women's movement, the same article stated, had been disappointed with the gender desk as "just a token and a lot of hot air".<sup>3</sup> The CEDAW committee members were also not impressed. Its members deemed the national machinery too weak having "no real power or responsibility to initiate and implement policy measures", and the gender focal points in ministries were useless without a co-ordinating body and a budget. The committee also complained about the salience of discriminatory traditional practices, such as *lobola* and polygamy, which the government had done nothing about (United Nations 1998).

That the gender desk was, indeed, a "lot of hot air" was indicated by the fact that gender hostility, even in high quarters, was on the rise. Zimbabwean men had had enough of gender equality, particularly when its demands reached into their own homes. Parliamentarians were quoted as stating that "traditionally women were always below men and this would continue", and Senior Minister Didymus Mutasa "warned Zimbabwean women not to adopt foreign ideas which called for equality between husband and wife" because such ideas "were not yet fully understood by Zimbabwean women".<sup>4</sup> For ordinary men on the street it was all a matter of feeling that women "must be panelbeaten (sic), spray painted and overhauled so that they fit the cultural expectations of our society".<sup>5</sup>

The government had done its part to enable "traditionalists" to re-emerge strongly. It had restored the powers of the chiefs to try civil cases with fines not exceeding Z\$1,000 in 1993, after they had undergone "re-orientation and training" courses apparently in order to "modernise" their views on women.<sup>6</sup> The president also refused to bend to the demand of women's organisations and the women's department to amend the law to allow women in customary marriages to register property in their own name. The reform had been on the agenda of the MCDWA from its inception, and it had come to be particularly pertinent in

1. *Herald*, 13 November 1998.
2. *Herald*, 13 November 1998.
3. Director of Women and AIDS Support Network, Priscilla Misihairambwi, in *ibid*.
4. *Daily Gazette*, 29 August 1994.
5. Cyprian Ndawana in a letter to the *Sunday Mail*, 3 January 1993.
6. *Sunday News*, 27 June 1993.

the land reform process, but President Mugabe dismissed the idea as “foreign” and a deemed reform unnecessary.<sup>1</sup>

The final offensive, however, came in 1999, when the provisions of LAMA were all but overturned by a Supreme Court ruling that affirmed the minor status of women under customary law in an inheritance case. One year earlier, the Minister of Justice, Emmerson Mnangagwa, had still maintained that changing LAMA would be “a backward and unconstitutional move”.<sup>2</sup> This was in response to a motion introduced in parliament, which demanded (again) that the right of parents to claim damages and *lobola* should be reinstated.<sup>3</sup>

The said court ruling concerned the case of Venia Magaya who had sued her younger half-brother for a portion of their father’s estate to which she had according to the new inheritance law a claim. The Supreme Court overturned her claim and unanimously ruled that “the nature of African society” dictated that women were not equal to men. Instead “women should never be considered adults within the family, but only as a junior male, or teenager.”<sup>4</sup> Effectively the court’s decision wiped out a large part of the legal gains of the majority of Zimbabwean women, including LAMA as far as applied to customary law, because it ruled that “Zimbabwe’s constitution exempts customary law from legal provisions forbidding discrimination”.<sup>5</sup> The ruling caused a world-wide wave of protest from women’s organisations and even World Bank officials.<sup>6</sup> The Minister of State responsible for Gender, Oppah Muchinguri, was not amongst the protesters, nor were objections raised by the Women’s League.

The history of the Ministry of Community Development and Women’s Affairs has been indicative of experiences with national machinery elsewhere in Africa, as it failed to maintain its high profile in pushing for gender equality. Its progressive work was only possible on the basis of the good-will of the party. When gender equality was no longer a government priority the ministry was unable to protect women’s rights. And even though the ministry “took on board all women’s burdens”, and other ministries “behaved as if they had no responsibility towards women”,<sup>7</sup> it was not consulted on issues concerning women when it mattered most.

Patricia McFadden, gender activist and journalist, refused to celebrate International Women’s Day in 1998 in Zimbabwe because it

... has now been taken over by the state. The Ministry of National Affairs makes it a day when they (sic) mobilise women basically to push the ideological positions of those who are in power in the country, positions which are patriarchal in nature. In Zimbabwe there is a very systematic mobilisation of tradition not only to close the door around women, but also to reconstitute the political base in the country.<sup>8</sup>

1. *Chronicle*, 2 August 1994; *Herald*, 5 August 1994.

2. *Chronicle*, 19 March 1998.

3. *Sunday Mail*, 1 March 1998.

4. Quoted in *ibid.*

5. *Zimbabwe Independent*, 11 June 1999.

6. *Daily News*, 4 June 1999, quoted in *Women and the Law in Southern Africa Research Trust News*, 11 February 1999, p. 8.

7. Hope Chigudu quoted in *Makan* 1997:85.

8. Quoted in ‘Human Rights-Africa: Women’s Day, No Cause for Champagne’. IPS Correspondents, 6 March 1998. [www.oneworld.org/ips2/mar](http://www.oneworld.org/ips2/mar).

Instead, progressive women once again pursued their agenda in autonomous women's organisations. The recent attacks by the government on women's rights would indicate, however, that neither the ministry/department nor the women's organisations have, as yet, proven powerful enough to oppose traditionalist patriarchy in the country. The fact that the number of women MPs dropped in the national elections in July 2000 from 14.7 to 10 per cent, and only one woman was appointed to cabinet, further confirmed the point.<sup>1</sup>

**From small to big:**  
*National machinery in Namibia*

In Namibia gender equality goals had been subsumed under the independence struggle, but they rose to prominence in the transition to independence. Nora Chase, an executive member of the South West African National Union (SWANU), who in the late 1980s had still maintained that feminism would "divorce women from the struggle"<sup>2</sup> emerged at independence as a strong advocate for gender equality. Instead of waiting for men to "fix it when independence comes", many prominent SWAPO women, too, made clear that they were no longer prepared to subordinate their interests to national concerns (Becker 1995:233).

Initially women concentrated their efforts on influencing the new constitution via the constitutional assembly and they intervened, as members of political parties, in party policy approaches geared towards the first free election. Othilie Abrahamsen, then a member of the leadership of the Namibia National Front (NNF), one of the smaller parties that contested the 1989 election, recalled that:

We pulled a lot of the strong women [and] we managed to get our party to give women prominence... to make it a priority in the election. So every time we had an appearance on the radio it was on women's issues. We found that every single party, even the male chauvinist ones, found it such a good thing that they all followed suit. You suddenly got all sorts of obscure women who never thought about women's rights pushing for women's rights.<sup>3</sup>

Even though not all the parties came up with manifestos as progressive as that of the NNF, which proposed that women's rights be part of a human rights charter as the basis of the new constitution and suggested the establishment of a gender commission (Becker 1995:231–236), gender concerns were also addressed in SWAPO and Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) manifestos. Both parties promised to establish departments of women's affairs, quotas and the like. Despite these common denominators women's unity across party lines remained elusive. Instead they were "geared more towards making their respective parties the victors than towards making women's issues part of the campaign".<sup>4</sup> As happened elsewhere only very few women entered the constituent assembly, which

1. Statistics of the Interparliamentary Union, Women in National Parliaments. [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm).  
2. Quoted in Kemp et al. 1995:146.  
3. Interview, Windhoek, 2 December 1998.  
4. Bience Gawanas, quoted in Becker 1995:236.

preceded the national assembly in the transition period. Nora Chase explained to Australian journalists that:

In a constituent assembly of 72 members we have 5 women – less than 5 per cent, whereas in the population we are close to 60 per cent. We heard this morning from the representatives of the constituent assembly that when they even open their mouth they are ridiculed ... to a point where they may decide to keep quiet. There are 13 deputy ministers out of whom one is a woman. That percentage is even worse.<sup>1</sup>

The influence women's activists and politicians had on the constitution writing process was, perhaps, more successful, in that the Namibian constitution was hailed as a major victory for women's rights and non-sexist politics. However, critics have pointed out that it did not made discrimination against women a criminal offence and only recommended affirmative action. Othilie Abrahamson, a gender activist and member of the Namibia National Front (NNF) complained:

When you consider that we come from a male chauvinistic society where men really regard women as big junk you will need more than just encouragement. You must make laws that make any kind of discrimination against women illegal. (Becker 1995:236)

Namibian women were more interested in gaining access to decision making structures and getting gender rights enshrined in the constitution, than thinking thoroughly about national machinery. This was perhaps a sign of the times, in which the experience that national machinery increased the marginalisation of women's concerns had discredited these structures. For Namibian women the fate of the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs in Zimbabwe was too close to home to ignore. Often quoting this case, women activists had instead the vision of a mainstreamed approach with female representation in all ministries and government departments coupled with quota systems (Becker 1995:273). SWAPO Women's Council (SWC) members had considered a women's desk as part of the National Commission for Development Planning hoping that there it would be imbued with considerable power of policy formulation.<sup>2</sup>

The women's desk that was established in the Office of the President in May 1990 was, Becker has suggested, "not created to meet the actual demands by the women's movement but was a decision of political top structures". The highest rank of its staff was at the level of under-secretary only (Becker 1995:273).

In the first few months of its existence the "gender desk" was no more than a virtual desk, housed in one room of State House, where it was difficult for visitors to access it on account of a number of security checks. The five members of the "desk" were all SWAPO members, and the two executive members, drawn from the executive of two large women's organisations, the SWC and the Namibian Women's Voice,<sup>3</sup> were appointed by the president. Initially they had

1. In an interview with 'Coming Out Show' National Radio Australia, broadcast 16 March 1990.

2. Interview, Windhoek, 3 December 1998.

3. Namibian Women's Voice was a largely grassroots oriented women's organisation, which remained autonomous from the liberation movements, even though its leadership was largely SWAPO and its aim was the mobilisation of women for the struggle. Becker's account of the history of the organisation would suggest that it was in many ways more successful in mobilising women than SWAPO's own women's section had been and that relations between SWAPO and the NWV were strained until the latter was forced to disband after independence (Becker 1995:196 ff).

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no job-description, and for the first two years they had no independent budget, but instead had to seek approval of the President's Office for all expenditures. In early 1991, the office was almost bare, its head even lacked business cards which would have established an identity of sorts: "We came into an office...not even a single page was there. But we tried."<sup>1</sup>

The gender desk defined its tasks mainly as co-ordinating all efforts related to women and liaising with other relevant ministries in order to make sure that women's concerns were covered by ministries. Initially this, too, was a hard struggle, since contacts with line ministries remained at a very low institutional level.<sup>2</sup> Matters improved when formal committees were established (Becker 1995:274), and the desk was elevated to a Department of Women's Affairs (DWA). The early initiatives of the department, moreover, were, according to Maria Kapere "a vision we have not tried to copy from other countries"<sup>3</sup> which its members had visited on a fact finding tour.

The DWA established nine committees, headed by members of relevant ministries, who were in charge of programmes. It also tried, from its urban base to co-ordinate regional activities. The Law Reform and Development Commission in the Ministry of Justice, for example, established a Women and the Law Committee that drafted new laws. However, in addition to this the DWA had hoped that it could widen its range of activities beyond its restricted budget via the NGOs. In this vision the DWA would campaign, advocate, look for money and get political support, co-ordinate in other words, and NGOs would take over the practical work of implementing programmes. Many NGOs did in theory agree that the department should be a co-ordinator, but in practice few came forward to work together with the DWA.<sup>4</sup> One reason why NGOs might have chosen to keep their distance from the DWA might have had to do with the idea that they were to support the DWA without remuneration, using their own funds. Members of the NGO sector believed that this was unfair, since in other cases DWA had been willing to pay expensive consultants (Frank 1999).

More important, moreover, was, that NGOs had been conscious of the possibility of government interference. For many the DWA represented ultimately a "SWAPO thing" because it had been, by intent or default, staffed almost exclusively by SWAPO members. Fears were, perhaps, heightened by an acrimonious debate after independence between SWAPO women and autonomous women's organisation over the formation of a national women's organisation which had floundered over disagreements concerning representation, with smaller groups fearing being swamped by the numerically strongest SWC (compare Chapter 6).

From the very start members of the department had lamented the absence of a national women's organisation which would have increased its efficiency and reach. Its head was quoted as complaining that it was difficult to co-ordinate all the women in the country without their organising themselves (Becker

1. Interview, Windhoek, 25 November 1998.
2. Interview, Windhoek, January 1990.
3. Interview, Windhoek, 25 November 1998.
4. Interviews, Windhoek, December 1998.

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1995:372). The fact that DWA took a leading part in a SWAPO initiated umbrella organisation of selected NGOs, and the head of the department acted as the chairperson of that organisation, discredited the DWA even further. Yet, even though the relationship between the department and autonomous women's organisations was cool, it remained cordial.

In 1996 the leadership of the DWA changed, after internal conflicts of the previous leadership rose to the surface. Instead of choosing another stalwart of the SWC the president appointed the former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. The new head was appointed at the level of director-general, and the department was up-graded to a department with ministerial rank, and representation in the cabinet. Yet, these improvements still had serious limitations. One disgruntled gender activist explained

... this cabinet representation is not a true representation because the lady from women's affairs is not accorded full ministerial status per se [...] In the cabinet she does not have the right to vote; her status is still reduced although she is paid like a minister...this is something that is bothering us a lot. She was appointed as a minister and then [after a few days] the decision was reversed to a director-general with a ministerial rank and no voting rights. See, she does not have decision-making power. Something has to be done, because people really have to put into practice what they say.<sup>1</sup>

Despite her limited formal decision-making powers, the fact that Netumbo Ndainwah made her career in the mainstream of the party might have helped her command the attention of her SWAPO colleagues. In fact, at the time of her appointment to Women's Affairs she was the candidate of the SWAPO Central Committee for the post of deputy secretary-general of the party, to be nominated at their next national party congress, until her appointment to Women's Affairs cut that promotion short. She managed to obtain a larger budget and a substantially increased staff. She had, in her own words, "blackmailed and bull-dozed" her way towards these improvements:

Because if we stayed the way we were then it is just good enough for you to say that DWA should be abolished. Because I do not want to be a decoration. You are there as a director-general but you have no staff, things are not moving, and people say that she is not doing her job... If I was just taken there to be put in the street – let me go in the street.<sup>2</sup>

Ironically, she used the drive to downsize and decentralise government as arguments for the expansion. Downsizing for her was a matter of getting the right size and that meant more staff:

We all agree that the majority of Namibians live in rural areas, and most of these people are women, and when we went to Beijing we addressed the issues of poverty and economic empowerment [especially] of rural women. I would need a staff member to travel on the ground to see what is going on... that would be very difficult. Not only the other government departments but also Women's Affairs must be decentralised.<sup>3</sup>

She also argued that mainstreaming needed staff to oversee that process in every ministry. She insisted that the submissions of all ministries would have to be

1. Interview, Windhoek, 3 December 1998.

2. Interview, Windhoek, November 1998.

3. *Ibid.*

dealt with by her departmental staff, because the ability of gender focal points, appointed at a low institutional level and expected to be in accordance with their gender tasks in addition to regular work-loads, could not be expected to perform their tasks adequately.

The DWA also pushed A *National Gender Policy and Plan of Action* through parliament in 1999, which required all ministries to engender their budgets, making Namibia one of the very few countries in the world that operate mandated women's budgets (South Africa is another). The National Gender Policy also provided for a Gender Commission to monitor the implementation of the gender policy, CEDAW, the Beijing Platform of Action and the women's budget initiative, as well as hearing complaints from the public on matters relating to the above (Republic of Namibia 1998).

Independent women's activists, however, remained critical of the Gender Policy document, suggesting that it was not based on consultation and was largely a repetition of the Beijing Platform of Action, which had not been sufficiently anchored in the Namibian context. It was also not sufficiently operationalised as it lacked a detailed allocation of responsibilities, resources and was quiet about time frames (Frank 1999). Criticism was also levelled against gender sector committees for not working consistently enough and for not getting enough support from the DWA. In addition, some gender activists have charged that DWA staff spent too much time at national and international conferences and too little time on getting the gender agenda moving (Frank 1999) indicating another kind of disempowerment:

We did not know the [gender] concept [during the struggle]. Gender to my mind is new, we have just adopted it. It is a catch-phrase and so we spend all our time in conferences on gender, instead of doing the things necessary to get into positions of power. See, I still see a lot of the gender discussions as an appeal to men to reconsider. It is not a demand followed by action which forces change. I am very cynical about this. We have a lot of discussion on gender, a lot, and it is almost the third decade after the UN women's decade and they are still thinking about gender, and they are still talking about baking and sewing classes ... I think that when the millennium changes they will even use computerised sewing machines ... We are quite happy to go from one conference to the other and from one workshop to the other, and we have been doing it for eight years and we have not realised that with every additional workshop [we forgo] one more job in management.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, despite all the gender training and workshop holding, the commitment of the government to gender equality has remained doubtful. Even though SWAPO had in its 1989 election manifesto promised gender quotas as a means of redressing gender inequality in decision-making, they have only been applied to local government elections and to public sector employment.

Yet, these gender quotas were very successful in raising the number of women councillors. The 1992 local government elections operated a restricted quota that specified a required number of women candidates but did not make stipulations about their position on party lists. 31.5 per cent of the elected councillors were women. In 1998, with a quota that specified placement on the party lists as well as numbers, the figure rose to 41.3 per cent moving women to hold-

1. Interview, Windhoek, 6 December 1998.

ing the majority of seats in 11 local authorities (Tjihero et al. 1998). That women have not had much of a chance entering decision making in this patriarchal country without a quota – even at local levels – was demonstrated in the 1998 regional elections, where only four per cent of the council seats went to women (Frank 1999).

In the civil service women have predominated by numbers but they have been confined to lower and secretarial ranks and been almost absent from the higher echelons.<sup>1</sup> They have also been under-represented in the decision-making bodies of political parties. The SWAPO Central Committee, for example, could in 1997 only attract 13 per cent women as members (9 out of 66), even though the national congress that elected them had just passed a resolution calling for women to make up 30 per cent of the candidates for the Central Committee and 50 per cent of the candidates for future national elections.<sup>2</sup> The Political Bureau had with 15.7 per cent (3 out of 19) a slightly higher percentage of women members.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1999 national elections, SWAPO's manifesto no longer even maintained the 50 per cent quota promised earlier, referring instead to various acts, the National Gender Policy and the modest increase of women in government<sup>4</sup> as proof that SWAPO had "started a movement to transform our political system to increase women's representation."<sup>5</sup>

That commitment was not realised in a list of party candidates for the 1999 national election with only 19 women candidates (26.6 per cent). Moreover, not only was this figure way below earlier promises, but only three women candidates appeared in the first 25 positions.<sup>6</sup> Overall, the effort was not very different from that of the DTA which had fielded 19 per cent women, even though it had consistently opposed quotas as "discriminatory window dressing" (Tjihero et al. 1998:4 and 5). True to its words was perhaps only the Congress of Democrats (COD),<sup>7</sup> a new political party, which turned out the highest percentage of women MPs: 3 of the party's 7 MPs (42.8 per cent) in the National Assembly were women.

Other examples which question the government's commitment to gender equality can be quoted. In 1995 the passing of the Married Persons Equality Act, perhaps the most central piece of post-independence gender legislation, which equalises the status of husband and wife in civil marriages, brought to the fore the deeply conservative and patriarchal attitudes of most MPs and councillors.<sup>8</sup> Many claimed that women's equality was not "African in style" and went against the message of the bible. What incensed men most was the fact that gen-

1. 'Namibian Women Outnumber Men in Civil Service, *Panafrican News Agency (PANA)*, 18 November 1999.

2. Quoted in Frank 1999.

3. SWAPO Party web site at [www.swapo.org.na](http://www.swapo.org.na)

4. SWAPO Party Manifesto 1999.

5. Prime Minister Hage Geingob quoted in *Panafrican News Agency*, 18 November 1999.

6. Election Lists of SWAPO and DTA, *Namibian*, Election 99 at [www.namibian.com.na](http://www.namibian.com.na).

7. COD also promises to "deliberately pursue a gender balanced policy and specifically promote and protect the interests of women" and it commits itself "to gender balance in all its structures." ([cod.namweb.com.na](http://cod.namweb.com.na))

8. "Row rages over equality for Namibian wives", *Sunday Independent* (Johannesburg)

der equality was to enter the domestic realm. A member of the National Council member argued that

... the bill was a plot by single women, adulteresses, foreigners, rich women, unhappy married women, old women who love young boys and women assigned by the Beijing Conference to undermine the Namibian way of life.<sup>1</sup>

MP Nathaniel Maxuilili told parliament that “women must be subject to their husbands as the head. We must be very careful of women [who] want to take over power” (Ipinge 1997:39). The reaction was in many ways similar to that brought about by the enactment of LAMA in Zimbabwe, also in that it greatly exaggerated the effect of the law. In Namibia no doubt was left that the law did not cover the majority of customary marriages.<sup>2</sup> Yet, unlike in Zimbabwe, the combined pressure of the DWA, the women’s parliamentary caucus and women’s organisations proved strong enough to push the bill through even without total agreement and mostly as a result of pressure from the president. One member of the Parliamentary Women’s Caucus boldly suggested “while our brothers in parliament united against us with the bible under their arms, we women caucused successfully on the basis of the constitution”.<sup>3</sup>

In later instances national machinery, women MPs, and women’s organisations have not united effectively, nor have they gained the support of the president. The draft Abortion and Sterilisation Bill, issued for public consultations in 1996, sought to legalise abortion under prescribed circumstances, but in April 1999 was finally “aborted” over claims that public opinion was overwhelmingly against the bill, which could therefore not be introduced.<sup>4</sup> While autonomous women’s organisations registered protest the Parliamentary Women’s Caucus<sup>5</sup> and DWA maintained a silence made even more deafening since in 1996 the ANC had pushed liberalised abortion legislation through parliament against vociferous public opposition and dissenting voices in their own ranks. The DWA was also unable or unwilling to move the Combating of Rape Bill, which came under the conservative chopper of parliament, even though the women’s movement was solidly behind the bill (Gobbler 1999).

The relationship between DWA and autonomous women’s organisations has further deteriorated since 1999 over the National Women’s Manifesto Network, which had been initiated by the more radical *Sister Namibia*, and was slammed by Netumbo Ndaitwah on account of its also taking up the rights of lesbians. She even went so far as to refuse the network, which supported a range of issues, including prominently an increase of women’s participation in politics, the department’s support and she advised Namibians to do the same.<sup>6</sup> This would lend support to the fear that the DWA is indeed dominated by SWAPO, whose members – including the president – have prominently gone on record

1. *Namibian*, 2 February 1996, quoted in Cooper 1997:475.

2. *Sunday Independent*, 17 February 1995.

3. Quoted in Frank 1999.

4. *The Namibian*, 20 April 1999 and 23 April 1999.

5. Interview 27 November 1998.

6. ‘Campaign to increase women’s participation in the democratic political process in Namibia. Phase 1: March to December 1999.’ Windhoek 2000 (draft).

condemning homosexuality, at the same time as Netumbo Ndaitwah did. Her effort to keep the party line over sisterhood apparently did not remain unrewarded. After her show of party loyalty the president appointed her as Minister of Women's Development and Child Welfare in March, the only expansion in an otherwise down-sized cabinet (Hopwood 2000). Netumbo Ndaitwah has been very successful in increasing her influence and staff complements, when other departments and ministries have lost them, but not without causing male colleagues to mock about the ambitions of women (Hama 2000).

Many women's organisations have registered concern about the response of the DWA towards the Women's Manifesto Network. They are also concerned about the slow pace with which new laws have been enacted (or not enacted). Many women in Namibia see this dragging of feet as a sign of much talk and little action. The DWA programme for action, including demands for a reform of the legal system that offers a re-definition of the family, a change in marital and property laws and a reform of the customary laws has been on the agenda since independence (Gawanas 1992:9). The Gender Commission, announced in the Gender Policy has not been established. Perhaps a decade after independence, with a revamped and broadened national machinery and with representation of women's affairs in cabinet, the time should have come to pressure the government to heed these modest demands.

#### **Diversified and mainstreamed: *South Africa's national machinery***

In South Africa discussions in the ANC and the UDF affiliated women's movements was taken further than in neighbouring countries. Experiences in Namibia had made it clear that a gender sensitive constitution alone was not going to change women's situation. In 1990, Namibian Minister for Local Government Libertine Amathila had already warned her South African sisters at a conference in Johannesburg that even though her government had made a beautiful beginning with the constitution, much more needed to be done to ensure that the constitution was translated into reality (Becker 1992a:50). And one year later the first joint statement of a number of women's organisations in Namibia registered disappointment with the fact that "practically nothing has been done to improve the situation of women" and it warned that nothing would happen until the relevant sections of the constitution were "translated into actual programmes".<sup>1</sup>

In South Africa discussions around the future national gender machinery were long drawn out and at times acrimonious. Unlike in Namibia there was a clear realisation that with majority elections and an ANC government, women activists would move from civil society into an institutional arena of politics where their relationship to the state had to be redefined. The necessary redefinition of roles in relation to the institutions through which gender equality would have to be established was considered crucial in consolidating the gains made

1. 'Women say the Constitution is not enough' *Namibiabrief*, 5, 1991.

during the independence struggle, and particularly the immediate pre-election period (Gouws 1996).

Discussions on the future institutions that should bear gender equality concerns had been going on from 1990 onward, the conference at which Amathila spoke being one of a string of others. Broad agreement existed that a sole women's department or ministry should be rejected, largely in order to avoid the pitfalls of neighbouring countries. Instead gender mainstreaming was promoted (Goetz 1998:255) not only at the national level, but also in the provinces (Gouws 1996:33). There was, however, also awareness of the need for the establishment of separate structures and strategies to deal with gender issues in the short term (Gouws 1996).

Initially a sizable women's lobby mooted a women's ministry or department as part of a "package" of structures. It was conceptualised as having considerable powers of decision-making and as being supported by strong gender focal points in line ministries. Proponents of a separate gender ministry argued that the "women's lobby in South Africa has been better organised at the time of negotiations as compared to other countries such as Zimbabwe", and it was hoped that this strength would provide "women with the opportunity of negotiating a better deal" such as more favourable budgetary allowance and staff complements. The "newly established tradition of gender consciousness" in the ANC was anticipated to create a firm basis on which to effect gender responsive planning programmes in ministries (Mabandla 1994:25 and 26).

The Commission for Gender Equality, which had been provided for in the Constitution, caused a great deal of confusion and controversy, because it had never been considered as part of the various "packages" that had been discussed until then (Madonsela 1995:34) and its mandate was not clearly defined by the constitution.<sup>1</sup> Some saw the structure as imposed by "certain 'male experts' during the last hours of the constitution making process" apparently without consultation. In fact, there were fears that the commission was to replace the "package" strategy, leaving it as the only institution that would guard gender equity concerns (Mabandla 1994:28). Strong proponents of gender mainstreaming, including Frene Ginwala, rejected the commission entirely on the grounds that it would marginalise gender issues unduly. Instead the Human Rights Commission, also provided for under the constitution, should take over the tasks of the gender commission,<sup>2</sup> in order to avoid it ending up as the dumping ground for what was perceived of as women's issues by the Human Rights Commission (Madonsela 1995:35).

The result of the discussions was agreement on "a package of structures which fan strategically through" government, the legislature, independent bodies, and civil society, also into the provinces.<sup>3</sup> It was presented to the CEDAW

1. The constitution states under chapter 9 paragraph 187 that the Commission for Gender Equality "must promote respect for gender equality and the protection, development and attainment of gender equality" and assigns it functions "including the power to monitor, investigate, research, educate, lobby, advise, and report on issues concerning gender equality".
2. Interview, Cape Town, 17 May 1995; Calland 1999.
3. Government of the Republic of South Africa, *CEDAW. First South African Report. Part 2*. [www.polity.org.za/govdocs/reports/cedaw2.html](http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/reports/cedaw2.html).

committee as embodying “the best practices gleaned from within and outside the country appropriate” to South African conditions. It had, the presentation suggested, been crafted on the basis of a “multi-pronged strategy” which detailed the specific mandates to “allow each structure to fill a particular niche.” These were anticipated to compliment each other since even though “all structures are involved in gender mainstreaming, there is a difference in the point of entry, the levels of involvement and the thrust of the operation by each structure.”<sup>1</sup>

In a simplified manner the “package” included an Office of the Status of Women (OSW) in the Office of the Executive Deputy President, which was expected to facilitate and co-ordinate the mainstreaming of gender concerns in government departments, while gender focal points would implement gender mainstreaming in line ministries. The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE), as an independent body, would “facilitate, through advocacy, the mainstreaming of gender in all of society”.<sup>2</sup> These two arms of the national machinery were also to be represented in the provinces. In addition a Women’s Empowerment Unit, based in the office of the Speaker of Parliament, and a Parliamentary Committee on the Quality of Life and the Status of Women, with members of all political parties, would be established in government at national level.

The OSW in the Deputy President’s office was conceived of as the apex of the national machinery, which by virtue of its location would have the powers to develop policy, including the National Gender Policy, and to ensure the implementation of policy in government. In addition the office, with a planned executive staff of six, would also include the measuring and monitoring of “issues of equity, which retard progress to equality”, inclusive of defining indicators of measurement. However, when the office was finally established in 1997 it had only two executive staff members, and its many planned functions were absorbed by the task of formulating the National Gender Policy document, which had been transferred from the former office responsible for the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP).

The Women’s Empowerment Unit was one of the first institutions to be established. An initiative of the Speaker, Ginwala, it has been largely donor funded and has done important work with regard to capacity building of women in national and provincial governments. The Committee on the Improvement of Quality of Life and Status of Women, initially started as an *ad hoc* committee in 1996, was established as a permanent committee to monitor and oversee the implementation of the government’s commitments made in Beijing and with regard to the signing of CEDAW. The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) was like the OSW belatedly established in 1997 with a wide mandate including monitoring, investigating, advising, and lobbying on issues related to gender equality.

1. CEDAW, Presentation of the Country Response to Questions and Concerns Raised by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Republic of South Africa. 2nd Report, Nineteenth Session. 29 June 1998, p. 4.

2. *Ibid.*

*Ambitious but Marginalised*

The development of this substantial national gender machinery did not happen without hiccups. The late establishment of the two principal institutions at national level in the “package”, OSW and CGE, three years after the new government came into power, created unnecessary difficulties and confusions. The majority of provincial governments had moved much faster and established gender units shortly after the 1994 elections, largely according to their own interpretations. Consequently confusion ruled over the role of national and provincial structures as well as the relationship between the different structures at provincial level (Gouws 1996:36). Provinces had looked to the constitution and set up what they called “gender commissions”, all of which were located in the premier’s office, but which operated, if anything, more like the provincial versions of what was to become the OSW rather than CGE (Albertyn 1996:7 and 8).

Provincial gender commissions thus for example, defined their mandate as to formulate rather than monitor gender policy. A 1995 workshop on national machinery came up with the idea that “provincial CGE commissions seemed to be taking on the role of the provincial machinery, whereas the National Commission was envisaged as an independent organisation (sic) located in civil society” (Albertyn 1996:37). In addition, and confusing matters further, provincial “gender commissions” in many cases took it upon themselves to initiate projects and raise funds, which brought them into competition with local NGOs (Albertyn 1996:12) rather than enabling them to coordinate them.

Moreover, provincial governments had no gender policies to refer to, attitudes among government staff did not favour gender concerns, and “gender commission” staff had neither the capacity nor the budgets to encourage gender mainstreaming or initiate gender policy debate in provincial government departments. The problems in the provinces were based on the delays in establishing structures at the national level which might have given guidance (Albertyn 1996:16).

The delays in the establishment of both OSW and CGE were at the time viewed by some gender activists and commentators as a sign of the lack of commitment of government. The initial lack of consent about the future role of the CGE had, moreover, started the commission off on a wrong footing and in a hostile environment. Criticism increased, when the CGE was finally established in 1997 with budgetary allocations that were well below those of other commissions. As a consequence the CGE had difficulties hiring staff and getting its operations going. The initial budget of 2 Million Rand did not even pay for the salaries of its 11 commissioners, let alone allow for the hiring of other staff, setting up offices or running programmes. In May 1998, when requests for additional funds to be allocated from the justice ministry, to which the CGE was answerable, had not been heeded, the commission threatened to subpoena the relevant minister in “an act of desperation” on the grounds that the government had contravened labour laws and breached the constitution.<sup>1</sup> In a separate statement, Colleen Morna, then an advisor to the CGE, suggested that the situation was such that “most organisations in a similar situation would have packed up long

1. ‘Gender Commission Threatened to Subpoena Ministers’, *South African Press Association (Sapa)*, 27 May 1998.

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ago” and she asked if the tenacity of CGE staff in hanging on was perhaps what was expected of women<sup>1</sup> and reflected government’s understanding of gender equality? (Morna 1998)

The first chairperson of the Commission for Gender Equality, Thenjiwe Mtinso, defined the most difficult and important role of the CGE as tackling gender issues at the grassroots level and in rural areas: “I know it will be difficult, but if just one woman says the Gender Commission helped her, then I have achieved something.” Traditional court systems, violence and superstition were all seen as part of CGE’s quest to contest patriarchal gender ideologies (Lakha 1997:141). In its first annual report the CGE accordingly defined its approach as endeavouring to “bring to the centre the voices and experiences of the marginalised, to become part of and to inform the nation building and transformation agenda of South African society”. It identified its main target as “women in rural areas, on farms, in peri-urban areas, in domestic employ and in informal settlements” (Commission for Gender Equality 1997–1998). With a low budget, and a hostile reception not only from the patriarchal establishment but also from within the women’s movement, the task of the CGE felt to Mtinso after one year like

... somebody has played a trick on you. They have dumped a big elephant in front of you and said: ‘Here is gender equality in South Africa. Eat it.’ (Stucky 1998:4)

The financial situation of the CGE later improved somewhat, with a budget increase to 11,2 million Rand in 1998/999. But promises that it would increase further to 25 million over the next three years and that staff would increase from 33 to 78,<sup>2</sup> were never kept. In 2001/2002 the budget was still only R13 million of which more than half was spent on salaries.<sup>3</sup> The Human Rights Commission, by contrast, was allocated a budget of R 27 million. Matters were made worse by internal tensions between commissioners and the secretariat, which led to a 40 per cent staff turnover during a period of 6 months in 2000 alone (Magardie 2000).

Given that the commission has perhaps remained the most tangible link between the government and the grassroots, the lack of funds and continuity have not been good news. Indeed, the work of the CGE has shown commitment to the grassroots, and the commission has cooperated with autonomous women’s organisations and the national government machinery, particularly the Committee on the Quality of Life and Status of Women. Yet, when Mtinso left the commission for her new job as Deputy Secretary-General of the ANC and two commissioners left in 1998, it took the government a year to replace them, for Joyce Seroke, the new Chairperson, a sign that gender concerns were still sidelined by government.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the new chair has also been very critical of the fact that the budget of the commission was and is allocated via the Ministry

1. The CGE commissioners and staff also include men.
2. ‘Long Walk Ahead. Gender Equality Commission 2nd Annual Report Finds’, *South African Press Association (Sapa)*, 9 April 1999.
3. ‘All froth and no substance’, *Daily Mail and Guardian*, 2 June 2003.
4. ‘Long Walk Ahead’, *South African Press Association (Sapa)*, 9 April 1999.

of Justice, rather than directly from parliament, as has been suggested. This, Seroke believed, clearly affected the independence of the commission.<sup>1</sup>

Launching the second annual report of the CGE, Seroke charged, in a much quoted phrase, that South Africans talk “the talk of gender equality” but that they are “still not walking the walk”. The report identified that “the gender structures in government remain weak and under-resourced”, particularly the OSW, that there is an emphasis on internal transformation rather than integrating gender equality concerns in the service delivery, and that therefore gender mainstreaming had remained weak in most government departments (Commission for Gender Equality 1999:2). Monitoring of national gender machinery by the Committee on the Status of Women had also concluded that gender desks were located within human resources instead of within policy departments where they could more easily impact on policy formulation.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the National Gender Policy took a long time to be finalised, contributing to a piecemeal approach to gender, which was often dependent on committed civil servants and ministers only (Commission for Gender Equality 1999:9). There have also been accusations that the OSW “had made itself vulnerable to criticisms of ineffectiveness by insulating itself from civil society”.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the modest attitude of the commission towards its own and the government’s achievements, much had, in fact, been achieved. Gender mainstreaming had been enhanced by the Women’s Budget initiated, on the basis of a model pioneered in Australia in the mid-1980s as a strategy for holding government accountable, in 1998 by ANC MP Pregs Govender who also headed the Committee on the Status of Women. It calculated the impact of government expenditure on women and has helped to sensitise economic planning departments to integrating women’s different experiences of policy measures. For Govender this meant that government had to think very consciously about how each department’s programmes impact on women rather than taking assumptions for granted (Primo 1997:40). It was credited with contributing to the mainstreaming of gender<sup>4</sup> by “educating bureaucrats to disaggregate the impact of their ‘mainstream’ programmes for women rather than just highlighting women.”<sup>5</sup>

Advances in the area of law reform have also been made, and they have been lobbied for by national machinery. In 1997 the Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Bill had been passed against widespread resistance in civil society, opposition parties, and the ANC’s own ranks, and 1998 saw the important Prevention of Domestic Violence, the Maintenance and the Recognition of Customary Marriages Acts passed. But even though these laws have opened up the legal space for women there is a clear recognition that tradition and custom still mit-

1. *Ibid.*
2. Ad Hoc Joint Committee on Improvement of Quality of Life and Status of Women, Annual report. August 1996–November 1997. Cape Town 1997, p. 11.
3. Likhapha Mbatha quoted in Commission for Gender Equality 2001.
4. The Women’s Budget tradition was broken by Finance Minister, Trevor Manuel in his presentation of the 2000 budget, which did not deliver a separate consideration of expenditure effects on women. ‘South Africa: No Women’s Budget this year’, *Inter-Press Service (IPS)*, 24 February 2000.
5. Marian Sawyer on the impact of the women’s budget programme pioneered in Australia in 1984; quoted in United Nations 1998:43.

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igate against their being effective. The Maintenance and Domestic Violence Acts, Seroke pointed out, “will remain just so many words unless the requisite infrastructure and human resources are provided by the department of justice”.<sup>1</sup> And even though the Customary Marriages Act grants customary marriage partners equal rights, it does not specify the legal future of polygamy and *lobola*, even though these customs are believed to be cornerstones of women’s subordination, particularly, but not only, in rural areas.

The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Bill, aimed at translating the Bill of Rights into equality on the ground to which the CGE and many other women’s organisations contributed, is meant to ensure that indirect and systemic discrimination of women will also be addressed. This includes the prohibition and prevention of, for example, witchcraft violence, genital mutilation and any other “traditional, customary or religious practice which unfairly violates the dignity of women and undermines equality between women and men”, sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination and discrimination with regard to inheritance and access to land, finance and other resources (Republic of South Africa 1999). The Equality Act also places particular responsibility on the CGE as an “Alternative Forum” to conciliate in some of the matters that come before the Equality Court provided for.

Whatever the achievements of national machinery and the short-comings imposed by budgetary allowances, staffing problems and attitudes, one aspect of the potential efficiency of national machinery remains a strong women’s movement outside institutionalised structures. The Women’s National Coalition represented this strength but since its decline after the 1994 elections it has not been replaced. National and provincial parliaments, local councils and national and provincial gender machinery have absorbed many women activists and local women leaders, throwing the national women’s movement into disarray. Curiously the success of the WNC inspired other women’s movements in the region and beyond to embark on similar ventures, but it failed to inspire a strong new women’s movement in South Africa.

1. The Long Walk Ahead’, *South African Press Association (Sapa)*, 9 April 1999.

## CHAPTER 6

## Women's Organisations and Movements

### *Sometimes Autonomy but Often No Unity*

The observation that in Africa women's action space was severely curtailed by tradition and custom and further circumscribed by the state and ruling political parties, has led many African women to opt out or disengage from the state, seeking to pursue their specific agendas in whatever autonomous spaces are available. Yet, perhaps just as many African women have chosen to forgo the autonomous pursuit of their own interests in order to lend their energies to broader political or social movements which were not specifically concerned with gender issues. Nationalist liberation movements all over Africa have benefited from the participation of women and their militancy. The fact that this happened over a period of roughly 40 years and in the knowledge that participation was no guarantee for women's demands to be addressed by male leaders would suggest that choices between autonomy and integration have been and are being made.

The conflicts in the 1980s between Western feminists and African women centred ultimately on the issue of autonomy, proclaimed as the *sine qua non* of women's movements in the West, and rejected as too narrow by those African sisters still involved in liberating their people rather than only themselves. Women's organisations in Africa often have a history in political parties and have been "closely associated with agendas for social reform... as well as making claims on the state for women's rights and social rights more generally" and even autonomous women's organisations have frequently engaged in associations with non-feminist actors to pursue common goals. This has led Maxine Molyneux to suggest that women's movements are characterised by a diversity of interests and forms including state-linked mass organisations for women and other organisations that do not primarily advance women's specific gender concerns. More important than maintaining autonomy Molyneux believes has been the re-conceptualisation of women's interests and goals in the 1990s, when women's citizenship also came to depend on "the attainment of social as well as civil and political rights and upon gaining institutional power" (Molyneux 1998:219, 224, 240).

It would thus seem that the position, put forward by Aili Mari Tripp (Tripp 2000a) that for African women associational autonomy has been the most important condition from which they have been able to challenge the state, is too narrow to capture the myriad of strategies that have been pursued. Tripp has contended that autonomy is often the result of marginalisation and exclusion, but that African women in many cases managed to "seize on their auton-

omy” and use it as a vantage point from which “to determine and broaden their own goals, regardless of whether or not they conform to the goals of central government, local government, political parties, donors or other powerful actors”. And because women’s marginal positions have kept them “as a group” outside the benefit range of state patronage and clientelism, women’s organisations have emerged as powerful critics of patronage politics and corruption, demanding instead accountability from authorities, critical institutional reforms and, more generally, changes in the way politics is conducted (Tripp 2000a:1–27). Thus she quotes the example of post-one-party state Tanzania in the early 1990s when women’s organisations constituted 89 per cent of all NGOs “leading much of the reform initiative” at that time (Tripp 2000:199–200). Zimbabwe could be quoted as another example where women’s organisations have been hailed as having mounted one of the strongest challenges to the Mugabe government (Makan 1997:86).

There is no doubt that many African women’s organisations carefully guard their autonomous status and react negatively to attempts by the state to co-opt them, and that outside the co-opted versions of “state feminisms” they have been able to lobby for their own concerns. But with a few exceptions, only educated women in urban areas demanded their rights, to the exclusion of the majority of rural and urban poor women, who might have been largely autonomous from the state, but were unable to use this as an advantage because they lacked financial and societal autonomy and organisation.

It is, of course, true that relative autonomy facilitates the setting of broader and more radical agendas, independent of governments and political parties. But these agendas can only be carried further if channels of influence in state institutions are available – without engaging the state influence remains limited. National machinery for the advancement of women was thought to offer a solution but was soon found to be a dead end. What might have worked in a developed democracy like Australia where women managed to transform state structures in their favour as civil servants, or ‘femocrats’ (Sawer 1990), did not work in Africa, where governments and ruling parties were closely linked, even in democracies.

The opening of political systems has fostered the growing realisation that women’s movements can only be effective if they give way to enough autonomy to be able to work with women from political parties, governments and the churches in coalitions to push for specific interests common to all participants. This has amounted to admitting that autonomy alone does not work. But strategies have not been linear and straightforward, and women’s organisations have had to choose differing and changing strategies in the face of severe state interference.<sup>1</sup> Coalitions have thus remained dangerous ground, such as in Namibia, where the history of attempts to form a national women’s organisation has consistently failed either because of the fear of cooptation by the ruling party or because the ruling party feared the force of a strong coalition.

1. See the overview by Tripp 2001.

In Zambia, many progressive women refused to enter politics even in the political climate of the 1990s, but instead sought to help open up space for women willing to enter politics and to support them. Their non-partisan alliance managed to sufficiently threaten both the ruling party and the opposition to have some impact, so that the National Women's Lobby Group turned into a model for neighbouring countries until its success was eclipsed by the Women's National Coalition in South Africa.

The women's movement in Botswana was perhaps the most successful in challenging the state from the vantage point of its autonomy. A small group of professional Gaborone based women managed to pursue their own particular concerns, and *inter alia* win a victory for all women, and largely without their support when they won a court case that stated that the constitutional guarantees for gender equality must override customary law. Such an unequivocal government statement on the status of custom has not been repeated in the region. But when these gains were threatened, *Emang Basadi* members joined their sisters in the region who had started to open up towards state engagement.

**Mistrust and disunity:**  
***Women's movements in Namibia***

The first year after independence in Namibia saw a mushrooming of the non-governmental sector leading to an estimated 50 per cent increase of the 142 organisations the United Nations Development Programme had recorded in the first months immediately after independence. During the course of the independence struggle SWAPO had frowned upon community based organisations (CBOs) that engaged in development activities rather than mobilisation for the struggle, but when in government it initially welcomed the thrust of such activities (Becker 1995:287). Yet, the process of moving from struggle to development orientation was not easy. A prominent gender activist suggested after independence that "in the past we never were in a position to lobby with the government" (because it was not recognised), and that therefore lobbying skills were not well developed. Moreover, as has been the case in South Africa, many activists who might have been in a position to make the change had in fact been absorbed by government structures (Becker 1995:286).

However, one outcome of the re-orientation was that in April 1991 an NGO umbrella organisation, the Namibian Non-Governmental Organisations' Forum (NANGOF) was formed. It adopted a *Charter for Development* which specified that its 50 member organisations, which also included a number of women's organisations, "will remain independent of the government and shall endeavour to work with an existing democratically elected government", and "will be accountable to our various constituencies and the broader mass of the people".<sup>1</sup> The need to establish autonomy was necessary because many CBOs had experienced hostility from SWAPO during the struggle because its members were "not at all in favour of community initiatives because they supposedly promoted

1. 'The NANGOF Charter for Development', *Namibia Development Briefing*, 1, 1, 1991.

‘development’ while any developmental efforts prior to independence would counteract the policies of national liberation”.<sup>1</sup>

Women’s organisations were not exempt from this “historical hangover”, as Becker has aptly called it.<sup>2</sup> The operations of the SWAPO Women’s Council (SWC), the women’s section of the major liberation movement, had between 1977 and 1985 been reduced to “non-activity” within Namibia due to state repression (Becker 1995:167) and their main focus had never deviated from the mobilisation of women for the struggle (Becker 1995:167; Cleaver and Wallace 1990:82–84) with no attempts being made to engage in social and educational projects as had happened in exile.

However, women inside Namibia were more affected by the war situation than were women in exile. The practical concerns which arose from the war were taken up by community organisations. The churches, united in the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN), had started to become radicalised in the 1970s and to engage in community projects which were to empower people to help themselves (Becker 1995:189–196).

Organisations with more feminist ambitions had also been established. The Namibian Women’s Organisation (NAWA) was formed by women members of the Namibia National Front (NNF) after their return from exile in 1987. One of its leaders had been inspired in exile in South Africa and Sweden, but she found that she and her colleagues had little support for an autonomous organisation that was explicitly not the women’s wing of NNF: women were not ready for feminist ideas and men, also from within the NNF, misunderstood feminism as meaning that women wanted to simply reverse gender roles.<sup>3</sup> In an interview with Heike Becker in 1991 a NAWA member explained that “NAWA at the time was actually killed by many of the men who came back from [exile in] Sweden in NNF who did not want a woman’s organisation which will demand equal rights for all”.<sup>4</sup> To avoid the feminist label NAWA engaged in more general educational community projects, including community schools, and also agricultural projects until in 1989 it once more started to operate as a women’s organisation.

Under the influence of international donors CCN had also been organising an ecumenical women’s organisation. This process led, in 1997, to the founding of the Namibian Women’s Voice (NWV), an alliance of women across political and denominational boundaries, which in the following three years was to become the “beginning of an actual women’s movement inside Namibia since it consciously organised women around their practical and strategic gender interests for the first time”.<sup>5</sup> It managed to link gender concerns to the larger liberation struggle in that its activities remained part of the broader community based organisations that aimed at ending apartheid. NWV thus operated very similarly to UDF affiliated organisation in South Africa at the same time.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

2. Interview, Windhoek, 3 December 1998.

3. Interview with one of the founder members, Othilie Abrahamsen, Windhoek, January 1991.

4. Interview quoted in Becker 1995:321.

5. *Ibid.*

The broad base of NWV nurtured an approach that favoured collective responsibility, autonomy and decentralisation<sup>1</sup> and found its expression in a democratic bottom-up approach. Although many of the national executive members were also members of SWAPO they embraced an autonomous approach for NWV, knowing that gender concerns could not be easily raised within their own party. In fact, NWV built on the realisation that SWAPO had failed to anchor the notion of liberation into the daily lives of women. Instead it started with women's problems and tied them gradually into larger politics: "You cannot tell people, now if you are hungry, you just have to fight for independence".<sup>2</sup> Correspondingly many of the activities of NWV groups, which women themselves chose, were addressing practical gender needs, born out of their reproductive role. These activities led to decision-making and empowerment going hand in hand with educational activities. They linked into mobilisation for the struggle but they also challenged oppressive gender relations. NWV thus "invented a gendered approach within the politics of liberation"<sup>3</sup> in Namibia.

The fact that NWV questioned fundamental tenets of SWAPO liberation ideology, such as its members did in elevating gender to a "here and now" rather than a "perhaps after independence when you are good" issue, irked SWAPO and its women's section. Part of the problem was also that NWV had developmental aims, and used foreign aid for the improvement of women's and communities' lives rather than making that money available for the struggle. In time, one member recalled, "people were asked to isolate from the Women's Voice... they were regarded as spies and outcasts".<sup>4</sup> One of Becker's informants explained in 1991 that NWV met with the attitude that:

You work under the SWC or you can't operate if you don't work under SWC. So that whole thing started: You either work as we want you to work so that we can control you, or you don't work... Because men got threatened about the whole organisation which they couldn't control. And SWC, the men had control over. It's a sub-group of a men-oriented body. So they had to either pick-pocket [NWV] to SWC or they had to destroy it.<sup>5</sup>

SWC members apparently felt threatened by the organisation and its success, and just a month before the UN supervised transition to independence began, NWV dissolved under pressure. Unlike in South Africa 5 years later, where UDF-affiliated women's organisations decided to join the ANC Women's League on its return from exile, NWV had no choice in the matter, but was forced by circumstances beyond their control.

These events were still clear in the minds of non-SWAPO gender activists, when women's organisations once more got together to discuss the formation of a Federation of Namibian Women which was to act as an umbrella organisation for the many women's organisations that had sprung up between 1989 and 1990 in the transition to independence. Prominent among them were new

1. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

4. Interview in 1991 conducted by Becker, *ibid.*, p. 218.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 220 and 221.

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organisations that were overtly feminist, such as *Women's Solidarity*, a group involved in the counselling of rape victims; *Sister Namibia*, a collective involved in publishing a feminist magazine, originally with members sympathising with SWAPO and NNF; the old NAWA and many other organisations associated with churches, political parties and unions as well as self-help organisations.

Initially women came together at a CCN organised meeting to discuss their future in independent Namibia. The resolutions of this meeting stressed that a women's movement that united women across party and denominational divides was necessary "because it depends on us how we are going to build the nation".<sup>1</sup> There was, however, then and in later meetings no consensus on whether a unitary women's movement with individual membership or a federation with organisational membership was appropriate. Ultimately the realisation that unity was strength was not translated into reality as divisions occurred initially between members of SWAPO and those who were not.

In February 1990 Othilie Abrahamsen, a member of NAWA and NNF, proposed the formation of a federation, in which each member organisation retained its autonomy, suggesting that forming a single, individual member organisation might be too unrealistic an idea to pursue. She followed this up with a draft constitution for such a body.<sup>2</sup> The draft contained under articles 1.8 and 1.9 a clear statement to the effect that "a single, powerful national organisation was needed which can speak on behalf of all Namibian women" and which "shall represent them irrespective of their political, religious or other affiliations, even while the individual organisations retain their autonomy". Part of its mandate was the co-ordination of the actions of all affiliated groups in areas in which they had a community of interest.<sup>3</sup>

SWC members joined the discussions on an aggressive note, its representatives claiming that they had been deliberately excluded from the meetings. The SWC also mooted that the initiative was elitist, since it was concentrated in Windhoek only and excluded grassroots women. The representatives obviously took up the issue that SWC alone had a mass base in rural areas. Discussions stalled and were only resumed after independence in August 1990, when a steering committee was put into place and regular weekly meetings were conducted. By April 1991 talks over the constitution of the planned umbrella organisation stalled again. A member of the federation initiative suggested that SWC representatives were at the base of the failure to come to a conclusion:

On the day of the inception of the federation [a representative of SWC] got up and said: "If this federation is going to be established today, I call all of Katutura [the main African Township] to come and march in the streets. In protest." She said it openly at the meeting, because all of us wanted to establish the organisation. It was in April [1991]. People got up and said: "Now what is this nonsense?" And she said: "But we were not invited." But this was all nonsense, because people were invited through the public media. She felt she had not been invited personally.<sup>4</sup>

1. Women activists quoted in *ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

3. Proposal: Umbrella Organisation for Namibian Women. 3 March 1990. Windhoek (mimeo).

4. Interview, Windhoek, 2 December 1998.

In the opinion of the commentator the endless interjections of the SWAPO representative were meant to destroy the federation “because it was not a SWAPO thing”.<sup>1</sup> Arguments came again to centre on issues of representation on the national executive of the proposed organisation, with the smaller women’s organisations suggesting, in accordance with the original draft constitution, a uniform representation of two members per affiliated organisation, irrespective of size of the organisation, and SWAPO suggesting proportional representation. A participant in the meeting recalled:

[The SWAPO representative] said we won the elections and we want two-thirds of the seats [on the national executive of the federation]. And people said but women’s organisations did not go to vote in an election for the federation, why then come and impose a national election? The women’s movement had nothing to do with this. It was obvious, [she] was instructed to destroy the federation.<sup>2</sup>

For smaller women’s organisations, and particularly those more aligned to the opposition, SWC’s suggestion for proportional representation signalled their desire to dominate the federation, because they had the largest membership and would have gained a majority in the executive of the umbrella organisation, enough to control its activities. For SWC the matter was explained in terms of the alleged plan of smaller women’s organisations to establish other smaller splinter organisations, just to increase the number of representatives. A member of SWC who participated in the discussions recalled:

It was this political fear that that one group might overpower the other. Because it was according to size of the organisation. So [they] said every organisation must bring the same number of representatives and we were saying no, because some organisations have only one or two people, and those two they are going to represent who? That is how the debate came about.<sup>3</sup>

If the smaller women’s organisations were afraid of losing their autonomy vis-à-vis SWAPO and the government, SWC, in turn, was afraid of losing its dominant position to popular feminist organisations. Smaller women’s groups on the other hand realised that in order to build a successful federation, it would have to include SWAPO, because with the closing down of Namibian Women’s Voice, SWC was effectively the only organisation with a rural base.<sup>4</sup>

That anxieties existed on both sides of what turned out to be opposed factions was, perhaps, further exacerbated by the problems SWC might, despite its rural base, have had in re-defining its role from being the women’s section of a liberation movement to being the women’s wing of the ruling party. Its pre-independence role was defined by the need to mobilise women for the struggle and did not include a specific focus on women’s practical, let alone more strategic, gender needs. NWV had been so successful because it had made such concerns a central tenet of its mandate and strategy. Aware of this, SWC still remained a body adjunct to the party and guided by its policies, which bounded its opera-

1. *Ibid.*

2. *Ibid.*

3. Interview, Windhoek, 3 December 1998.

4. Interview, Windhoek, January 1991.

tional radius. In the post-independence years SWC activities thus continued to be locked in a rather conservative WID approach, which did not move much beyond sewing, cooking and income-generation. The activities also dominated its women's centre in Katutura. The most liberating activity of the centre was perhaps its English classes.<sup>1</sup>

Recognising the limitations of political party wings SWC representative members to the federation negotiations were interested in an organisation "where women join as individuals, representing nobody", the very idea that had earlier been dismissed by non-SWAPO women as being a premature attempt at unity. For non-SWAPO women a single member organisation also posed the same problems as a federation with proportional representation would have, considering that SWAPO members would presumably have constituted the largest membership. For SWC, however, a single member organisation would have solved two of their problems, as it would have ensured control of SWAPO over the members of smaller organisations and created opportunities for them as individuals to pursue policies not necessarily in line with overall SWAPO goals:

We also realised that when you are representing an organisation, for example a political organisation, you have to behave and take issues that are agreed on by that political party. In this [single member organisation] we do not need to bring our political differences there, our political party views there, because we are talking about our issues as women. So we said let's stop the organisational representation because it is not going to work and it is going to complicate our life – it is not even going to give us freedom.<sup>2</sup>

After eight months of meetings which led to no agreement, because what represented "freedom" to the one faction meant being constrained to the other, the groups separated and agreed to build two organisations, a federation and a single member "umbrella". The Federation of Namibian Women was formed with "few people" and, according to a founder member, "it never turned out to work".<sup>3</sup>

The single member organisation, Namibian National Women's Organisation (NANAWO), was formed during a three day meeting with 250 delegates in November 1991. It was generally recognised as being dominated by SWAPO and SWANU, and had the support of the president and the prime minister.<sup>4</sup> For non-SWAPO members it was

... a SWAPO initiative. It is a NGOGO – a NGO-government initiative. I remember during the preparations for Beijing this federation thing spilled over and there was a fair amount of discussion if the NGO preparatory meeting should include political parties. Because whenever they came there was trouble, whereas the NGOs worked well together. And then we had a meeting with [the minister of women's affairs].<sup>5</sup> She actually called us to the meeting and said: "You see, NANAWO is the umbrella." And I do not know if they do not understand or pretend not to understand. It is not an umbrella organisation.

1. 'SWAPO Women's Council: Women in Nation Building', *Namibia Development Briefing*, 1, 7 and 8, 1992, p. 3.
2. Interview, Windhoek, 3 December 1998.
3. Interview, Windhoek, 2 December 1998.
4. 'Women Organise', *Namibia Development Briefing*, 1, 6, 1991.
5. By then Netumbo Ndeitawh, the minister of women's affairs, was actually also the chairperson of NANAWA.

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NANAWO does not have affiliates, it is just a single organisation like NAWA. It is not confusing, but they are trying to confuse.<sup>1</sup>

NANAWO members have continued to maintain that a federation of women's organisations is not possible in Namibia, because "if it is going to include women from political party wings then it is going to operate like the national assembly where you have problems".<sup>2</sup> Members of autonomous women's organisations tend to agree on a different level when they suggest that "within the framework of the party which is controlled by reactionary men, you cannot do justice to the women's movement. How can you?" It is such attitudes that have kept Namibian women's organisations at arm's length from the SWC, the Department of Women's Affairs, and women politicians:

They represent the party. What are they doing for women? Now and then something happens and we get together. It happens. Look at this parliamentary caucus [of women MPs]. When they launched it they said to us: "We want to be the caucus through which you speak." "OK", we said, "that's fine. And we can tell you what is happening in the community." I have never been to a second meeting. I never heard that there was a second meeting.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of the collapse of the talks about a federation, the optimism that marked the NGO movement at independence had declined. Kenneth Abrahams, a former figure in the NNF and an active member of the NGO movement, noted that the government had failed to come out with "clear-cut policies on NGOs" through its National Planning Commission, and that "there is a bid for bureaucratic interference without the bureaucrats themselves coming up with guidelines". This had thrown the NGO movement off-centre:

The NGO movement had expected a supportive government whereas in practice it has not worked out that way. They need to reconsider and find out if this government constitutes an asset for their delivery or not and adapt their strategy accordingly.<sup>4</sup>

Nashilanga Shivute, former chairperson of NWV and at the time the director of the women's desk, described the situation in 1992 as a lack of understanding of democracy:

In the past women could either politically support the liberation struggle or the status quo. That was the main issue. [Now] the problem is that people in this country think they could only demand their rights if they are part of the government or support it. But it is the constitution that protects the rights of every male or female Namibian. All, no matter which party they support, can stand up and demand their rights. I think that is something that the women's movement should make use of. Until now we have not managed. A space has been created for the women's movement, but it has not been realised, exactly because of the fear of cooptation.<sup>5</sup>

The situation had not dramatically changed a decade later. The women's movement was still split between SWAPO aligned and autonomous groups and a bridging of the gaps was not in sight. Squabbles as to which group represented

1. Interview, Windhoek, 2 December 1998.
2. Interview, Windhoek, 3 December 1998.
3. Interview, Windhoek, 2 December 1998.
4. 'NGO development so far: Two views', *Namibia Support Committee*, 1, 9, 1992.
5. Quoted by Becker 1992:14 [translation from German by the author].

Namibian women, and if a women's umbrella body existed or not spilled into a workshop organised by the SADC gender unit in November 1998,<sup>1</sup> and SWC and DWA have continued to frustrate the efforts of autonomous women's groups.

In the run-up to the 1999 national assembly elections *Sister Namibia* initiated greater collaboration among women in government, political parties and the public sector by taking up the idea, as had been done in South Africa and Botswana, of drawing up a Women's Manifesto of demands ahead of the 2000 general elections. The idea was not entirely new in Namibia, since the draft constitution for the women's federation of 1992 also referred to the formulation of a Charter for Women's Rights as one of its mandates. The Women's Manifesto Network realised this plan which was meant to serve as a tool for lobbying political parties, and for mobilising the broader electorate (Frank 1999). The Women's Manifesto Network consisted of "non-governmental organisations, political parties, government, trade unions, private sector, churches and individual activists",<sup>2</sup> and had the financial backing of a number of foreign donors and the logistic support of the National Democratic Institute. Its members believed that "democracy cannot be truly achieved if women's political participation is negligible" and it challenged political parties to include 50 per cent women on their party lists, and women to vote for political parties that had promised to appoint more female members of parliament (Maletsky 1999a). The manifesto gained the support, not only of a regional human rights network,<sup>3</sup> and a female MP in South Africa, but also of all major opposition parties.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the spokesperson of the network, Elisabeth Khaxas, had expressed hope "that the manifesto will be supported, in principle, as a serious effort to hold government accountable" (Maletsky 1999). But if the opposition parties pledged their support even though they did not agree on every detail of the manifesto, SWAPO and the DWA opposed it vehemently and in its entirety.

SWAPO did not respond to the Network directly when invited to make comments, but the then secretary for information and research of the SWC, Eunice Ipinge, condemned the "so-called" manifesto for "confusing Namibian women and diverting them from the core concept of gender equality" by "incorporating homosexuality into gender issues" and she lambasted "elements that would like to use gender equality as a step-ladder to reach their own goals that have no relevance to gender". She charged that apart from introducing homosexuality, the manifesto was just duplicating the National Gender Policy. The attack was surprising, because, according to network spokesperson Khaxas, only nine words of the 25 page long manifesto spoke about the human rights of gay and lesbian people. Ipinge, moreover, who also headed the Gender and Development Unit at the University of Namibia would have been expected to have had more enlightened views on homosexuality, even though it was not entirely astonishing that she used this in Namibia controversial topic as an anchor to slam an initi-

1. Interview, Windhoek, 2 December 1998.

2. 'Parties challenged to include more women', *Namibian*, 10 September 1999.

3. 'Regional Groups back manifesto', *Namibian*, 4 November 1999.

4. 'Women score poll victory', *Namibian*, 11 October 1999.

ative that had not been controlled and directed by SWAPO and its Women's Council.

Her comments were in line with those of the male leaders of her party, including the president, who had lashed out at homosexuals as representing a European based "hideous deviation" which had no place in Namibian society. It was an effective way to discredit the efforts of the network with those who tended to share the views of SWAPO.<sup>1</sup> It apparently inspired the then Director General of the Department of Women's Affairs, Nandi Ndaitwah, who also refused to cooperate with the initiative because she could apparently not "support the human rights of gays and lesbians".<sup>2</sup> Gate-crashing one of the network's meetings she warned Namibians to reject the Manifesto because "it was asking women in Namibia to promote homosexuality" because its call for the introduction of sexual education in schools represented "a call to our children to be taught how to become gays and lesbians".<sup>3</sup> Ndaitwah maintained her critical stance towards the Network alleging that some of its members have been so vocal about gender equality because homosexuality was not accepted in Namibia.<sup>4</sup>

The Network survived, gained more support also amongst political parties and politicians, both men and women. Its members now find that the resistance of the SWC has lessened. Being part of a successful and increasingly popular movement has become a more viable and desirable strategy rather than opposing it. Even Iipinge and Ndaitwah, despite their initial opposition to the network, have firmly subscribed to the network's 50/50 campaign and the demand for placement of candidates on zebra-lists. The network has thirty plus affiliated NGOs, has organised regional and town facilitators, and held many workshops all over the country.<sup>5</sup>

The strategy of the Namibia Women's Manifesto Network has been to seek alliances with a broad range of organisations subscribing to manifesto goals, to call on political parties to adopt quotas where quotas do not exist, to place women on zebra-lists, even where quotas are in place, such as in local government elections, and to adopt more comprehensive gender policies. In addition the Network has urged local authorities to establish gender desks and to make use of gender budgeting exercises. This represents a very comprehensive approach to women's participation in politics, which has effectively helped push for changes within political parties and government. The fact that SWAPO placed 28 percent women candidates on the party list in the 1999 national elections, and that overall a 26.4 percent representation of women in the national assembly was achieved, is one strong indicator of the network's success.

1. 'Swapo slams gays', *Mail and Guardian*, 5 February 1997.
2. Personal information, Windhoek, May 2000.
3. Quoted in 'Campaign to increase women's participation in the democratic political process in Namibia. Phase 1: March to December 1999'. Draft Report. Windhoek, no date.
4. She refers to two prominent members of the Network initiative, who are publicly declared lesbians and have gone to court to effect permanent residency for the non-Namibian partner on the grounds of their relationship (personal information). The *Sister Namibia* offices were set on fire in 2000 as a suspected protest against the pro-gay activities of the organisation (*Namibian*, 11 July 2003); see also *Namibian*, 10 July, 2002.
5. Elizabeth Khaxas, '50-50 in government: Get the gender balance right', *Sister Namibia*, 8, 2000; Interview Windhoek, 9 February 2004.

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More important, however, has been the fact that the Namibia Women's Manifesto Network has been able to build what appears to be the first unified women's movement, which encompasses many NGOs and reaches down to regional level. One of the women MPs who entered parliament on a COD ticket, moreover, is a former member of the women's movement, who has not disappointed her sisters in that she uses parliament as a gender platform.<sup>1</sup> In time there is hope that even the Ovambo regions in the North, which are the stronghold of SWAPO, the region where the network activities have encountered resistance, and the SWC might still wholeheartedly join the movement and present for the first time in Namibia a united women's movement.

**"Women denied the Hour":<sup>2</sup>**  
*Lobbying for women's political representation in the era of democracy in Zambia*

In Zambia professional women started to look at politics with new eyes when the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) came on the scene in 1990. In many ways the change from one-party state to multi-party democracy had an almost invigorating effect on women's aspirations in the women's movement too. Professional women, for example, felt emboldened to register public criticism over the fact that Mr Chiluba, then the leader of the opposition MMD, had in his first public interview declared that his wife "enjoys living under my Bemba autocratic rule". In a letter to the editor of the *Daily Mail*, the activists had questioned the MMD commitment to women's issues expressed in the election manifesto and they concluded that "women must now work to ensure that the new pluralist politics is not merely a contest between groups of men, who regard women as subordinates outside the political arena".<sup>3</sup> Most of all, professional women had realised that:

You have to be there where the decisions are made and you can discuss it and make the changes. We felt that the NGOs who had done a lot of work had not been able to get through because of that lack of representation in decision making in government. Many of the NGOs realised that you cannot stay away from politics, because you just do your thing in the corner and you are never going to make any change in there. We have seen a transformation in the NGOs, completely different from what they were doing a number of years ago. A complete transformation. It is no longer teaching women that it is good to be Christian wives and women... but they are talking about the empowerment of women. Know your rights and use them. It is the result of the work of the Decade [of women] – people realise that you cannot separate politics from gender issues.<sup>4</sup>

It was on the basis of such concerns that the National Women's Lobby Group (NWLG) was formed in June 1991, three months before the October 1991 national elections that ended 27 years of UNIP rule. It was made up of members

1. Interview Windhoek, 9 February 2004.

2. This was the motto of the women's movement to mark its disappointment with the new government, International Women's Day, 8 March 1992. "The Hour has come", was the slogan of the Movement for Social Democracy (MMD) at its inception as a popular based opposition to the one-party state, which turned into a popular "The Hour", signalled by the hand sign associated with peace, representing the call for democratic change, even after the change of government.

3. *Daily Mail*, 16 March 1991.

4. *Ibid.*

of various professional organisations, lawyers, prominent women activists, established organisations like the YWCA. Most of its members were urban, middle class women, a fact that was used against them by their adversaries. The group defined itself as non-partisan and vowed to lobby for the political advancement of women irrespective of political affiliation, particularly at the decision-making levels of political parties, parliament and government. The first chairperson of the NWLG, Laura Harrison, explained that “never before in Zambia had women come together to claim political power”.<sup>1</sup> It was perhaps for that reason that the emergence of the group caused such a furore amongst women, political parties, and ordinary Zambians.

For progressive, professional women who formed the core of the women's lobby group political participation in the Women's League of UNIP had been particularly unacceptable, but the advent of democracy was seen to open up for them more meaningful avenues of taking influence. The slogan of MMD, which had spearheaded the democratic change as a pressure group, “The hour has come” had also assumed meaning as the beginning of women's political representation. The campaign of the NWLG thus included support to women willing to contest the first multi-party parliamentary elections in October 1991, and it planned fund-raising ventures to “fund campaigns of aspiring women parliamentary candidates irrespective of which party they represented”. Perhaps equally important was an education campaign in which women voters would be “taught why they should vote for women parliamentary candidates”.<sup>2</sup> The NWLG explained its non-partisan position as wanting to support women in politics by their numbers, to reach a critical mass of women in government, since “even if they do not address gender issues, it is better than not to have them at all”.<sup>3</sup>

The NWLG, however, was not able to pursue its goals effectively. The embattled United National Independence Party (UNIP) attacked the group as working for the CIA and being sponsored by “the Americans”<sup>4</sup>. In a full page pre-election advertisement in the *Times of Zambia* UNIP had expressed its dissatisfaction with national and international election monitoring teams, and its authors claimed that NWLG was in cahoots with the United States to remove the UNIP leadership and install a “puppet government in Zambia”.<sup>5</sup>

Another such advertisement framed by the slogans “UNIP: The Voice of Reason and Love Speaks” and “The UNIP Women's League in Tune with Daughters and Mothers of Zambia” represented an official statement of that body. It claimed that the lobby was not neutral since it had no UNIP members, to whom the Lobby was alleged to be hostile, that it acted as a front for the opposition parties, and thus did not represent all Zambian women. Interestingly the League claimed that a “UNIP Women's League Lobby Group” had in collaboration with NGOs achieved the election of 3 and 8 women MPs in the 1983

1. ‘Laura speaks out for people's rights’, *The Weekly Post*, 19 November 1993.
2. ‘Women set up lobby group’, *Zambia Daily Mail*, 22 July 1991.
3. Interview with NWLG executive member, Lusaka, 11 January 1994.
4. ‘Laura speaks out for people's rights’, *The Weekly Post*, 19 November 1993.
5. *Times of Zambia*, 26 October 1991.

and 1988 national elections respectively.<sup>1</sup> This invention of history belied the fact that the League had explicitly not claimed political power but had defined its role as being adjunctive to that of male politicians<sup>2</sup>, and indirectly accused the new advocates of women's rights of dismissing past achievements. In the run-up to the elections League members vented their anger and disrupted meetings of the NWLG, such as in a Lusaka market, where lobby members tried to address marketeers, the majority of whom were held to be UNIP members.<sup>3</sup>

The hostility of UNIP cadres was, perhaps, explicable, given the history of the party and its position in the multi-party turn-around. UNIP had never embraced democratic aspirations, let alone gender equality, nor had professional women embraced UNIP and its Women's League. But the hostility the NWLG met with went deeper than that, because MMD was not supportive of the organisation either. One commentator, herself a member of MMD at the time, suggested that the Women's Lobby managed to "really frighten the government to death, they really did a good job".<sup>4</sup>

This was altogether more astonishing because many of the women members of MMD were openly sympathetic to the lobby, and the MMD leadership had come out strongly in favour of women's rights in its election manifesto. Initially criticism from within the MMD leadership came mainly from its chairperson for Women's Affairs, Princess Nakatindi Wina, a member of the Lozi royal family and a wealthy business woman, who a week after the launch of the lobby had declared that women involved in politics should either belong to the UNIP Women's League or the MMD WID committee she was chairing.<sup>5</sup> She also claimed that "it was difficult for any party to believe the party was non-partisan" intimating that the Lobby Group was a political party and its members were going to stand for office themselves. In her mind it would have been "much simpler if the group had nothing to do with politics" and avoided dabbling in current affairs.<sup>6</sup> What concerned her and other MMD members was that the Lobby Group confused the electorate who did not understand how its members could claim to be "both UNIP and MMD":

And [they] confused them even more talking about... the rights of women only – that was really like waving a red flag in front of a bull... we had to motivate them slowly [step by step] but [the lobby] wanted people to understand everything at once, whether WID or what..."<sup>7</sup>

The Lobby Group was thus accused of being divisive, distracting attention away from winning the election against Kenneth Kaunda and UNIP.

But perhaps even more important for Nakatindi was that Lobby Group members were "highly educated, and they just wanted to involve professional people, doctors, nurses, while I wanted to involve every femine (sic). That is why

1. *Times of Zambia*, 25 October 1991.
2. As described and discussed in Chapter 5.
3. 'Meeting disrupted', *Times of Zambia*, 17 September 1991.
4. Interview, 4 February 1994.
5. Quoted in Liatto-Katundu 1993:80.
6. 'Lobby Group hitches listed', *Daily Express*, 15 October 1991.
7. Interview, Lusaka, 4 February 1994.

we sort of differed.”<sup>1</sup> This statement added substance to the allegation that “the Princess”, as she was popularly called, feared that the members of the group wished to take her position away from her<sup>2</sup> and tell her what was right and wrong.<sup>3</sup>

In the face of opposition from both major political parties who allegedly went so far as to intimidate township dwellers into not attending the meetings of the NWLG its successes were meagre. In September that year the chairperson of the Lobby had still told the press that “three women candidates and two gender sensitised men” had requested help to promote their election campaign,<sup>4</sup> but the nomination result brought no changes from the past. Both MMD and UNIP had fielded only 7 women candidates each who constituted 4.7 per cent of nominated candidates for each party (Longwe and Clarke 1992:107).<sup>5</sup> In a press statement in September the NWLG strongly criticised the “seemingly deliberate move taken by UNIP and MMD to leave out valid women candidates”,<sup>6</sup> but its members thereafter lent their energies to a local election monitoring team.

Surprisingly the Lobby did not use this opportunity to gather information on both women voters and candidates. In fact, none of the larger National and International Election Monitoring and Observer Groups paid much attention to the issue of the presentation of women in the run-up to these important and otherwise well documented elections (Andreassen et al. 1992:45–48). The only retrospective study done by independent local consultants later concluded that gender had remained a non-issue throughout the election period, both in the press and in the election campaigns of the political parties (Longwe and Clarke 1992).

The NWLG became active again after the new MMD government announced its cabinet, which included no women ministers and only five women deputy ministers (13.9 per cent). With only 4.8 per cent of MPs women, political representation had not significantly changed from the previous government, and had in some instances declined (Longwe and Clarke 1992:115). A week after the elections, the NWLG urged President Chiluba to seriously address the issue of women’s representation in the new cabinet and in government,<sup>7</sup> and a delegation of lobbyists “provided him with a list of qualified women who were suitable for appointments” (Longwe and Clarke 1992:115).

Other demands included the amendment of the constitution to give women full protection against discrimination, a 50 per cent quota for diplomatic appointments, the appointment of 4 women among the MPs nominated by the president, and the establishment of a suitable national machinery for the promotion of women in government.<sup>8</sup> A joint NGO petition argued that the representation of women in decision-making was necessary because “as a definable social

1. *Ibid.*

2. Interview, Lusaka, 9 February 1994.

3. Interview, Lusaka, January 1994.

4. Laurah Harrison quoted in Phiri 1991.

5. Newspaper reports at the time claimed that the number of women candidates was eleven or twelve.

6. *Times of Zambia*, 11 September 1991.

7. *Times of Zambia*, 6 November 1991.

8. ‘Women petition Chiluba: Honour election manifesto’, *Daily Mail*, 20 March 1992.

group, [they] have separate and distinct material interests which have to be addressed”.<sup>1</sup>

The reactions of the president to the petition were not promising. He did not agree with the Lobby tactic of urging women voters to only support women candidates, since this “amounted to a partisan position” and to “setting up a women’s party independent of presently established parties”. He suggested that he did not appoint more women because only very few had supported the party when it was founded, and since “people were appointed to implement party policies a person’s record of party work and loyalty were of great importance”.<sup>2</sup> Even more critical was his suggestion that the MMD’s Women’s Development Committee “was the administrative machinery for spearheading women’s development even if its chairperson was unpopular with most of the women within and outside MMD”.<sup>3</sup>

Women’s organisations had much to worry about, since Chiluba’s vision as expressed in the meeting was deceptively like that of the one-party state, a vision in which women’s issues remained tightly under the control of the ruling party and only women who toed the line were appointed. According to one gender activist this was not surprising since, “they are the same people just changing [membership] cards. For MMD and UNIP if you keep your women members quiet, then you have done your job.”<sup>4</sup>

Professional women were again forced to be party stalwarts if they were to be admitted to limited power sharing. They were also again faced with a representative, who was as unpopular with professional women as Mrs Kankassa had been. Princess Nakatindi Wina did indeed engage in a similar rhetoric as her UNIP predecessors had done, urging women “to work tirelessly towards the rebuilding of the ravaged economy”, cautioning them “against advocating for equality if that equality was at the expense of the nation”<sup>5</sup> suggesting that “national success largely depended on successful marriages” and coming full circle she urged women to raise funds for the MMD.<sup>6</sup> Many women MMD members had already left the party or at least its women’s wing because they refused to be associated with its head.<sup>7</sup> Her hostility towards professional women exacerbated the problems:

The party tries, if anything to encourage women. When we started off there were a lot of women supporting MMD – all the women who had never voted in their lives [because they

1. ‘Petition to the President by the delegates from the ZARD seminar on “Using the Electoral Process to Promote Women’s Rights” held on 1st February, 1992’. Lusaka, 27 March 1992 (mimeo).
2. As to how many women attended the inaugural National Convention on Multi-Party Option in July 1990 has remained a moot point but participants have suggested that many women felt too fearful to attend that meeting and that only eight of the 300 participants were women. At that first convention “the top people appointed each other to top positions”. This changed later during party elections in September when 4 women – two had attended the first meeting – were appointed to head committees. Interviews, Lusaka, 26 January and 1 February 1994; *Times of Zambia*, 5 May 1992, Akashambatwa Mbikusita-Lewanika and Derrick Chitala (eds), *The Hour Has Come! Proceedings of the National Conference on Multi-Party Option*. Lusaka 1990.
3. ‘Brief account of the NGOs’ petition to the President, Mr Frederick Chiluba, at State House, on women’s rights and development, 27 March, 1992’. Lusaka, 17 April 1992 (mimeo).
4. Interview with executive member of the NWLG, Lusaka, 11 January 1994.
5. *Times of Zambia*, 16 December 1991.
6. *Times of Zambia*, 27 April 1992.
7. Interview, Lusaka, 24 January 1994.

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did not agree with UNIP politics]. It is in our own department for women where you start experiencing discrimination. Who has come in goes out again.

Relations between MMD and the NWLG further deteriorated after that March meeting and further attempts to meet with the president over the realisation of viable national machinery stalled. The lobby had at the time started a more focused and coordinated campaign geared towards mobilising women for the local government elections that were to be held later that year. Again workshops were held, candidates were encouraged and counselled, and education campaigns for women voters were launched: if women were not admitted to national politics, local politics seemed more accessible and suited to women's preoccupation with practical gender needs.

But nothing could have been further from the truth. Women Lobby Group members were attacked by MMD cadres, women coming forward to stand on an MMD ticket were sufficiently intimidated to have them withdraw their candidacy and in some cases primary elections which favoured women candidates were annulled.<sup>1</sup> The press helped whip up the controversy about the Women's Lobby Group so effectively that, in the words of one contributor to the debate, "so much noise has been coming from the Women's Lobby that some eardrums are almost damaged now".<sup>2</sup> The noise, of course, was not coming so much from the members of the Lobby Group, but rather from the political parties and the public who failed to understand the difference between a lobby group and a political party. Zambians continued to believe the Lobby was a political party and some wrote its members off as a bunch of frustrated educated "females" taking revenge for not having been given positions in the new government.

Thus pushed into a corner the defences of Lobby members often added to the confusion. In mid-March when the media campaign against the NWLG started to peak the *Times of Zambia* reported a spokesperson of the group explaining that support of women candidates of any political party "would not be automatic but would largely depend on the calibre of the candidate". In the case of two women candidates standing in one constituency "the women's group would like to support a candidate who would be firm in decision making and intelligent".<sup>3</sup> The remark related to an incident in 1992 when a UNIP women candidate wanted to stand against an MMD woman in a parliamentary by-election. When she consulted the Lobby three weeks prior to the close of nominations she was told that she should "consult with her party, that she might be a bit late and that she should avoid duplicating". As a result the Lobby was accused by UNIP of betrayal.<sup>4</sup>

In April that year things got worse for the Women's Lobby Group, when executive MMD members, men and women, concerned with the slow pace and direction of the democratisation process and internal party policy matters

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1. Interview with gender activist and member of the NWLG, Lusaka 26 January 1994. In 1995 women were reported to make up only 2 per cent of the 13,000 councillors elected in Zambia. 'Gender Discrimination rages on in Zambia', *PANA News Agency*, 2 December 1999.
  2. 'Is lobby group non-partisan?' *Times of Zambia*, 24 March 1992.
  3. 'Lobbyists to back up women', *Times of Zambia*, 16 March 1992.
  4. Interview, Lusaka, 11 January 1994.

formed a Caucus for National Unity (CNU) to lobby for more accountability within the party. In what the *Sunday Times* called an “over-reaction” of the ruling party that had not “grasped the essence of new democratic culture”,<sup>1</sup> the president called on “faithful members of his party, including cabinet ministers, to stop associating with activities” of pressure groups such as the CNU and the NWLG.<sup>2</sup> The Speaker of Parliament himself counselled two of the women MPs to stop attending Lobby Group meetings in order not to jeopardise their political careers (Ferguson and Ludwig 1995a:32). That the CNU and the NWLG were thrown together<sup>3</sup> was regrettable but not altogether astonishing since one-party state thinking was still very much alive and challenging the government and the party was considered the same thing.

In the following months the CNU and the NWLG continued to be treated as two phenomena of the same kind. In one contribution to the *Weekly Post* an anonymous MMD member called them “embittered groupings” which “parroted high sounding terms borrowed from the Americans”. To the writer “positive discrimination and affirmative action” were mere “pet projects” that could not be allowed to become national tasks. Instead the Women’s Lobby should “address itself to the problem of indisciplined (sic), drinking, smoking disco-goers who lack motherly and paternal attention and control”.<sup>4</sup> And an editorial of the *Times of Zambia*, held that the donor funds the NWLG attracted should be put to better use, such as “on dress making lessons among women in the townships”.<sup>5</sup> The political system had on the surface changed, ideas about women’s place obviously had not.

At the end of April that year, the Ndola branch of the MMD threatened “to expel all members of the CNU and NWLG from the party”. District chairman John Kapapi declared that the activities of the groups “would retard the economic recovery programme” and, apparently victimising all women candidates, members of the Lobby or not, he declared that “the women who wanted to stand on an MMD ticket in the local government elections had been disqualified”.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile the talks of the NWLG and the Non-Governmental Coordination Committee (NGOCC), an umbrella organisation of women’s organisations that had emerged as a result of the preparations for the 1985 UN Women’s Conference in Nairobi (Touwen 1990:54–64), had drawn up a proposal for a Women’s Bureau in the Office of the President, headed by a cabinet minister and mandated to co-ordinate the mainstreaming of gender into ministries and to act as a policy formulating unit.<sup>7</sup> The proposal caused opposition. The leader of the WID unit in the National Commission for Development Planning, a relic from

1. Editorial, *Sunday Times*, 19 April 1992.
2. ‘Chiluba blasts 2 pressure groups’, *Times of Zambia*, 13 April 1992.
3. The connection between the CNU and the NWLG perhaps started when a women activist with concurrent memberships in the NWLG and MMD participated in a meeting of the CNU.
4. ‘CNU, Women’s Lobby are “Embittered” Groupings’, *Weekly Post*, 8–14 May, 1992.
5. Editorial, *Times of Zambia*, 16 March 1992.
6. ‘MMD hotheads expelled’, *Times of Zambia*, 27 April 1992.
7. NGOCC, ‘Proposal to the President on Establishing a Governmental Bureau for Women’s Development’. Lusaka, August 1992 (mimeo); Interview with gender activist, Lusaka 26 January 1994.

the UNIP era, rejected the proposal because she feared that she would stand little chance of being promoted to a new structure.<sup>1</sup> Princess Nakatindi also had a different agenda. She had in September that year convened a National Convention for Women to discuss the issue of a future national women's machinery and had without much consultation even amongst the participants (Lopi 1992), which did not include women MPs or NGOs,<sup>2</sup> decided that she wanted a Ministry of Women's Affairs which she proposed she should head.<sup>3</sup>

When in April 1993 Nakatindi was appointed as Minister of Community Development and Social Services, a sneaking suspicion arose that it had been made into a kind of women's ministry for the "Princess"<sup>4</sup> and was to replace national machinery. There was little doubt that in her short reign (she was suspended from her ministerial position on corruption and drug-trafficking charges a month later) Nakatindi turned Community Development into a "ministry of women's groups".<sup>5</sup> She managed to create a powerful constituency in marketers, rural women, and grassroots women's groups, by "readily handing out gifts rather than talking about long-term solutions". She believed that for rural women "to be in politics they have to receive benefits" – in her case sewing-machines and second-hand clothing "to generate their own projects".<sup>6</sup>

Rural women liked the presents and filed into the ministry in such numbers that the sofas in the waiting-room were, according to the next minister, "worn out by overuse in a month".<sup>7</sup> Rural women believed that it was the "the first time in Zambia that they received adequate attention from the government".<sup>8</sup> For professional women, however, it was a painful step "back into the future":

To go around and give away second-hand clothing? Totally crazy! The Government buying second-hand clothing? [And] every constituency would get K 500,000 and one sewing machine. I thought that was ridiculous. How can you take one sewing machine to the whole of Lusaka and tell the women, I have brought you a sewing machine. The whole idea was wrong.<sup>9</sup>

Whatever the intention of the Ministry of Community Development had been, talk about a Women's Bureau or other national machinery did not come up again for some time. Apart from the allocation of a separate budget, and the elevation of its head to permanent secretary status, the WID unit in the National Commission for Development Planning (NCDP) remained what it had been.<sup>10</sup>

The NWLG had also not been very successful with supporting aspiring women politicians, since its support often turned out to be a liability for women interested in being selected by their party. Fearing for their chances of being

1. Interview with a member of NWLG, Lusaka, 26 January 1994.
2. Interview, Lusaka, 8 February 1994.
3. Interview, Lusaka, 26 January 1994.
4. It was apparently not conceived of as such at the very start, when a male minister headed it.
5. Interview with senior civil servant, Lusaka 24 January 1994.
6. Interview, Lusaka, 4 February 1994.
7. Interview, PS Social Development.
8. 'MMD Women Miss Nakatindi', *Times of Zambia*, 24 January 1994.
9. Interview, Lusaka, 8 February 1994.
10. Interview with participant in the meeting, Lusaka, 27 January 1994.

nominated they dissociated from its activities. Many of those who managed to get into office also stayed away, not daring to jeopardise their positions. Others distanced themselves because the Lobby had shown them hostility for not raising enough gender issues in parliament.<sup>1</sup> Several women MPs moreover claimed that the NWLG had never helped in their campaigns, and that they owed them nothing. When support was offered at all, it was of a moral kind only, hardly able to alleviate women candidates' greatest handicap compared to men: the lack of campaign-funds (Ferguson and Ludwig 1995a:30). Instead women candidates had to rely "on old women with no teeth" in their constituencies for votes, and (often male) members of their parties and the business community for financial support.<sup>2</sup> Only three women MPs, for example, participated in a workshop, organised by a women's NGO associated with the NWLG on using the democratic process to consolidate women's rights in March 1992 (Shakakata and Clarke 1992). Most likely they were the same who also claimed to be members of the NWLG! (Ferguson and Ludwig 1995a:30)

But there were also those who credited the lobby for successes, commenting favourably on their persistence in lobbying the president, and using the international exposure they enjoyed to embarrass him sufficiently over the lack of women in government,<sup>3</sup> to make him appoint 3 women ministers and nominate women candidates in three by-elections.

Yet these successes also had drawbacks in that the government counteracted the tactics of the NWLG by appointing women who did not represent Lobby Group choices. Divide and rule tactics were also employed by pairing women in executive positions in ministries and exploiting any conflicts that arose between them. In two by-elections MMD nominated their own women candidates against those supported by the NWLG.<sup>4</sup> This ultimately also happened with the national machinery when it was, in accordance with the vision of the gender lobbies established as a Gender and Development Division in the Office of the Vice President (GIDD), headed by a Permanent Secretary in 1996. GIDD has remained understaffed and dependent on donor funding, and has been staffed by relatively weak civil servants. The MMD government thus undermined the policy of the women's lobby to seek women irrespective of quality or political affiliation, tying their hands because they could no longer complain that MMD sidelined women.

After a brief period of offensive attack, the women's movement retreated again into the corner, where defence against a hostile environment took all their energy and time. Preparations for the Beijing conference in 1995 and the 1996 national elections revived activities around the NGOCC and the NWLG. In the years that followed the Lobby has taken the demand for political representation of women issued in Beijing as a basis for renewed action against the continued

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1. Interview, Lusaka, 4 February 1994.
  2. Interviews, Lusaka, January and February 1994.
  3. Interview, Lusaka, 26 January 1994.
  4. 'MMD axe falls on 15', *Times of Zambia* 30 July 1992; 'Walubita fired from MMD', *Times of Zambia*, 12 August 1992; Interview, Lusaka, 8 February 1994.

lack of women in decision making.<sup>1</sup> For the 1996 parliamentary elections the NWLG was reported to have trained 176 women candidates in campaign management and to have raised funds to offset the campaign costs of some of the 15 women that contested the election.<sup>2</sup> In the 1988 Local Government Election the number of elected women councillors could be increased from 26 to 88 out of a total of 1,300 (National Women's Lobby Group 1998). The Lobby also established a Forum for Women Politicians in 2001 and again trained and supported women candidates for the 2002 national elections. Despite the efforts of the NWLG women MPs represented only 12 per cent of MPs and a mere 7 per cent of councillors.<sup>3</sup> The low representation of women was not due to a lack of interest though, since 198 and 673 women candidates successfully filled in nomination forms in the 2002 national and local elections respectively.<sup>4</sup>

However, with the emergence of a greater number of political parties through the 1990s the hostility between the Women's Lobby Group and UNIP decreased. A book published by the Lobby on women politicians in Zambia in 1998, for example, has paid particular attention to the contributions of the UNIP Women's League stalwarts and was dedicated to one of them (Nalumango and Sifuniso 1988). But a report by the Lobby also suggested that at the same time as its members had worked well with candidates as individuals, relationships to political parties had not improved (National Women's Lobby Group 1998:16).

Their successes have been very moderate, however. In 2001 in the run-up to the 2001 national elections, the Lobby Group formed Women in Politics Forum and concurrently adopted with this and other NGOs a Women's Manifesto, largely as a tool for the election campaign that year, which then also served as an election manifesto of sorts for all women candidates no matter what party they represented.<sup>5</sup> This time round the NWLG was also more explicitly backed by constituent members of the NGOCC. The women's movement also stipulated on that occasion that in order to qualify for the support of the NWLG prospective women candidates "should be at the forefront in emphasising gender equality and support for women" and that they should be well known (Bull 2001:96 and 99). Being a woman was no longer considered qualification enough to qualify for the NGO support, including a candidates' support fund which distributed bicycles to 70 parliamentary candidates. The fund also paid for posters and *chitenge* cloth<sup>6</sup> for all parliamentary candidates and posters and

1. According to statistics of the NWLG in 1999, women made up only 16 of the 158 parliamentarians and 67 of the 13,000 councillors. There was still only one woman ambassador, two women cabinet ministers, and seven permanent secretaries; 'Zambia Women's Lobby Group analyses local government polls'. *The Post of Zambia*, 28 January 1999.
2. 'Women make gains in Zambian elections', *African Women in Politics. An Update*. African-American Institute, New York, February 1997.
3. Zambia National Women's Lobby Group, *Monthly Lobby Bulletin*, 5 April 2001, and *Lobby News*, 5 December 2002.
4. Interview, NWLG, Lusaka, May 2002.
5. 'Embattled Nawakwi still under Siege', *Times of Zambia*, 4 December 2001.
6. "Traditional" gift of politicians to women – often with the face and name of the male candidate printed on the cloth. The custom is closely tied in with the culture of the women's wings of political parties.

caps for all local government candidates, apparently notwithstanding their gender sensitivity (Bull 2001:116).

However, despite all these efforts, after the 2001 elections women MPs still represented only 12 percent of MPs and a mere 7 percent of councillors<sup>1</sup> even though 198 and 673 women candidates had successfully filled in nomination forms for the parliamentary and local elections respectively,<sup>2</sup> and 148 women candidates, moreover, had been adopted by 11 political parties contesting the parliamentary elections (Bull 2001:116). This indicated that while the women's Lobby Group was able to mobilise willing women candidates, that electorates have not been willing to elect them, suggesting deep-seated opposition to women's entry into mainstream politics. Not discouraged by the lack of immediate success the NWLG has also joined the 50/50 movement, a bold step, considering that Zambia is still a long way off the 30 percent mark, which the government committed itself to with the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development.

The attention that the Lobby Group commanded in the early 1990s has thus perhaps been weakened over the years, but then, during the group's heyday, its members were able to inspire women's movements elsewhere in Southern Africa and they, in turn have been inspired. In 1992 the NWLG secretary Rose Mulumo still countered the criticism of ANC women that the lobby supported women no matter what ideological direction they and their respective parties pursued, by stating that "women's issues are women issues" (Liatto-Katundu 1993:82). Ten years later the NWLG had joined a broader political coalition of NGOs concerned with the government's lack of commitment to democratic values.

The pressure of NGOCC and NWLG led in 2000 to the adoption of a National Gender Policy, on the table since 1998, the policy for women in all political party structures and in government.<sup>3</sup> The policy suggests a large number of policy interventions to redress gender gaps, including a 30 per cent representation of women in decision making, measures to enhance women's access to land, and a review of laws to enhance women's access to productive resources, credit and information (Government of Zambia 2000). There is evidence, however, which suggests that the adoption of the Gender Policy was not based on the convictions of President Chiluba and his government members but a result of the mounting pressure from the NGOCC<sup>4</sup> and from foreign donors, such as Norway.<sup>5</sup>

Thus despite all the successes of the women's movement, gender issues have not moved forward in Zambia. The implementation of the Gender Policy has been taken

1. Zambia National Women's Lobby Group, *Monthly Lobby Bulletin*, 5 April 2001, and *Lobby News*, 5 December 2002.
2. Interview, NWLG, Lusaka, May 2002.
3. 'Gender discrimination rages on in Zambia', Panafican News Agency, 2 December 1999.
4. 'Women in Gender Policy protest', *Times of Zambia*, 5 November 1999.
5. Michal Sata, Minister without Portfolio, who represents the WID unit, complained on 2 March 2000 that "our friends, their Excellencies, are very radical. They have been giving me difficulties and the Norwegians have even withdrawn their support until the gender policy document is approved by cabinet." Quoted in 'Favouring women kills initiative', *Post of Zambia*, 2 March 2000.

seriously only by the NGOCC, who have drawn up an action plan, Movement 2000, which prioritises tasks and allocates roles and responsibilities between NGOs and government agencies in the implementation of the policy. GIDD rejected this plan and hesitantly came forward with its own plan, presented as a *fait accompli* to the NGOCC in 2002.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the NGOCC have moved women's issues into a broader political context when they actively participated in the Oasis Forum, a grouping of a broad section of NGOs formed in February 2001 whose members successfully opposed a constitutional review to allow President Chiluba to stand for a third term in office.<sup>2</sup> One of the most effective protest actions put in place by the NGOCC, was the wearing of green ribbons and the honking of car horns in the early evening by those opposed to the review.<sup>3</sup> The Forum outlived Chiluba and has continued to use similar tactics to influence the ongoing constitutional review process.<sup>4</sup> The coalition between NGOCC and other strong NGOs and church groupings, not necessarily concerned with gender equality, has been strategically important for the women's movement, increasing its strength and influence, also concerning gender issues the women's movement wants to see addressed in the new constitution.

#### The citizenship law and democratic rights in Botswana: *Stand up women*

In March 1994 the Botswana *Guardian* published a contribution by Unity Dow in which she questioned her country's reputation as a leading democracy in Africa:

Can we as Botswana citizens expect our government to respect our rights and freedoms? Are the laws of Botswana made to protect us whether we are married or single, rich or poor, male or female?<sup>5</sup>

One year earlier a columnist had charged in another newspaper "if the battle to safeguard women's rights in this country is lost, the reputation of the country for upholding democracy and human rights would be completely shattered" and advised that "aggressive lobbying is the only way the women of Botswana can get the government to respect their rights" (Molebeledi 1993).

Such vehement questioning of democratic values in the name of women's rights was new in Botswana, where, according to the already quoted columnist, "women's rights were a non-issue" because "the general attitude was that Botswana society had never developed a tradition of discrimination against women" (Molebeledi 1993), or rather women had not dared question patriarchal values. In 1987 members of the government had still confidently referred to "the God-given right of men to rule and be superior to the women".<sup>6</sup> The

1. Personal information.

2. *The Oasis Declaration*, 21 February 2001, Lusaka.

3. Personal information, Lusaka, May 2002.

4. 'Honk at own', *Times of Zambia*, 25 July 2003.

5. Unity Dow, 'Stand up and fight', *The Guardian*, 4 March 1994.

6. Quoted in Gift Siphso Siso, 'Botswana women campaign against "boundary of love"', *Zambia Daily Mail*, 30 April 1987.

exposure of such antiquated, and certainly not democratic, values in a country respected for its democracy and human rights record, a respect which reached well beyond the region, was brought about by a group of dedicated gender activists who in 1985 formed the first autonomous women's organisation in Botswana, *Emang Basadi* (Stand up, women).

The immediate reason for their need to organise was what appeared at the time to be the minor issue of the Citizenship Act that the government had amended in 1982. In due course the fight against the new act proved to be a fight against deep-seated patriarchal traditionalism and it also proved to be the birth of an autonomous women's movement in Botswana. Unlike in the other two cases reviewed in this chapter, Botswana women emerged on the political scene not on the basis of an opening up of political systems by democracy but instead on account of a tightening of already restricted rights extended to women. Of all three cases, the actions of *Emang Basadi* brought about, perhaps initially unwittingly, the most immediate and long-term effects in furthering women's rights. The women's "coup" also held the attention of the international community for some years and has become the subject of a number of academic and human rights activist publications internationally (Brown 1992; Human Rights Watch/Africa 1994).

The new citizenship act of 1982 provided that "citizenship would be determined by the citizenship of the father in the case of children born in wedlock irrespective of where they were born". In addition the citizenship act also ruled that the "acquisition of Botswana citizenship should be preceded by residence in Botswana for a minimum period of ten years" with no exceptions being made for men married to citizens of Botswana. For foreign women married to Botswana citizens, however, the period of residence was set at 2 1/2 years only (Republic of Botswana 1986:11). Botswana women and their foreign husbands with children resident in Botswana were most immediately affected by the new law and they objected to its discriminatory nature.

Already before the passing of the new citizenship act, Clara Ohlsen, then a functionary in the BDP and married to a foreign citizen had experienced that having a child by a foreigner in Botswana was not an easy thing. At the time the new citizenship law was tabled before parliament Ohlsen started to lobby against it amongst MPs and the executive of the BDP, but she realised that this was an issue that was met by "stony silences and blank faces".<sup>1</sup> A small group of women activists asked for a meeting with MPs over the issue. Only six agreed to meet the women:

They were all drunk. They especially went and got alcohol and got drunk to make it into a derisory meeting. That was a week before the law was passed. These men were drunk, they just laughed at us, and some of their remarks were very derisory. The Law was passed by parliament, almost unanimously. There was absolutely no opposition to it.<sup>2</sup>

When Ohlsen entered parliament as an MP in 1984 she defined lobbying for fresh consultations over the law as her most important immediate task. With

1. Interview, Gaborone, 7 January 1994.

2. *Ibid.*

difficulties, and without the agreement of her party, she presented a motion in parliament, that the law should be reviewed. Eventually it was agreed that the Law Reform Committee, one of seven select committees of the National Assembly consisting of the attorney general and seven members of parliament, should consult the people over the law during hearings on a number of proposed law amendments in 1996. Included in the consultation process were aspects of the marriage law, the law of inheritance, the electoral law and the citizenship act. The report of the commission, headed by D.N. Magang, a member of parliament, which summarised the hearings of the commission all over the country, found "overwhelming support" for the citizenship act of 1982. It claimed that the law represented the "clear and unequivocal expression of the will of the people" and recommended that it be retained (Republic of Botswana 1986:12).

The report exposed serious biases on the part of the commission against a revision of the citizenship law and the women who demanded it. It also revealed that the inquiry into the citizenship act was equated with an inquiry into the legitimacy of patriarchy, namely the right of the husband to be the head of the household who decides on behalf of his dependents, women and children. The questioning of the right of fathers to determine the citizenship of their children, almost perversely, questioned the very foundations on which Botswana society was based. Critical commentators suggested that the citizenship debate was therefore not about culture and tradition "but about men protecting their own status, because they have altered so much of tradition without getting the permission from the nation".<sup>1</sup>

Traditional Botswana society is strictly partilineal, with the consequence that upon marriage women become a part of the husband's family. They henceforth are expected to reside in his village, and are subject to the rulings and laws of his family. A *lobola* secures rights not only over the wife but also over the children she bears. This implies that children become part of the husband's lineage, taking his name. It was against this background that the Law Commission chose to phrase its representations over the changing of the citizenship act suggesting that it was all about women wanting to marry men and usurp a husband's privileges as head of household. To make matters worse the commissioners explained to their audiences throughout the country that the objections had been raised by "a small group of educated vocal and articulate women in Gaborone, mostly married to foreigners" (Republic of Botswana 1986:11) who, because they were professional women with a university education acquired abroad, were out to destroy Botswana identity with foreign men and ideas. *Inter alia* they were even accused of introducing potential spies to the country who were likely to "sell secrets" to the South African government.

Clara Ohlsen described one of the meetings convened by the commission she participated in thus:

There were also women. When we came the men were sitting on the chairs and the women were sitting in a corner on the ground. So I decided I am not going to sit with the women, because I felt it would have undermined my position. They started as they usually start,

1. Interview with opposition politician, Gaborone, 2 July 1994.

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this was the minister of telecommunications saying that he had come to talk about a number of laws: "There are a number of women from Gaborone, who think they know better than everybody else. They say we should change our culture, women must now go and get men from the outside and bring them to their village, which is something against our culture." So I stood up and complained that instead of consulting with people you are telling them what you want. As I talked some women came and I went on talking about the citizenship act and that it has nothing to do with culture. I was talking about the rights of men and women who are both citizens in this country. I said that women have equal rights before the constitution and the law infringes on the constitution because it reduces women's rights. And they have been talking about custom – but there is a saying that a "child is most important at her mother's place". And the women said: "Is this what it is about? We thought that you were going to change nature and culture." (Republic of Botswana 1986:11)

It was, therefore, not astonishing that villagers responded loudly and aggressively reclaiming Botswana custom, where "men marry women and not the other way round". And, gender activists have pointed out, opinion had it that "women in Botswana should be in a subordinate position. The president, Masire, is a reasonable man, but on this issue he is totally unmoved".<sup>1</sup>

The 1986 report of the commission effectively closed the door for *Emang Basadi* to further raise awareness on aspects of gender inequality in Botswana, particularly in the area of family law (Molekomme 1987; Basadi and Republic of Botswana 1989) and they therefore demanded an immediate review of the law. *Emang* worked closely together with the Women's Affairs Unit, which was at the time headed by a prominent gender activist, and the *Women in Law in Southern Africa* project, a regionally based research project concerned with women's legal status. Its members had been discussing challenging the citizenship act in court since 1983. They decided to back Unity Dow, a Botswana lawyer and member of *Emang* married to an American, who was willing to test the government's commitment to the constitution. In the beginning, recalled a member of *Emang*

... some people were very angry not because she challenged patriarchy but because they wondered how she could dare to take the government to court. To some people there is nothing like a constitutional right. What Unity has done is to simply exercise her constitutional right and demand something. But people thought that it was just crazy to do this.<sup>2</sup>

Taking the government to court over the citizenship act was thus questioning the political apathy in Botswana's democratic system, the notion, in fact, that government is inviolable and cannot be reached by the people. But it was first and foremost about exposing gender inequality in legislation and a test intended to set a precedent for further legal action on behalf of women's rights. After an initial defeat in the lower courts, the case came on appeal to the High Court in 1990. By then the case was much publicised beyond Botswana's borders with more than those immediately involved in the case looking forward to the judgement.

After seven months of deliberations the High Court ruled in favour of Unity Dow. But more than that the judgement declared that:

1. Interviews, Gaborone, January 1994.

2. Interview, Gaborone, 7 July 1994.

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The time that women were treated as chattels or were there to obey the whims and wishes of males is long past and it would be offensive to modern thinking and the spirit of the Constitution to find that the Constitution was framed deliberately to permit discrimination on the grounds of sex.<sup>1</sup>

The High Court also held that custom and tradition must yield to the constitution. Citing international human rights conventions, such as CEDAW and the OAU Charter of Human and People's Rights, the High Court potentially broadened the impact of the judgement beyond the borders of Botswana, setting an example for all countries that constitutionally protect fundamental freedom and have ratified international conventions.<sup>2</sup> The judgement was a blow to the government that had argued in its submission that the citizenship act reflected the "modern morals of Botswana society" as decided by parliament, and that "the court cannot interpret the Constitution for a minority group".<sup>3</sup> The government contested the decision and launched an appeal that was also turned down. The attorney general talked of a "big constitutional crisis the like of which we have never seen" believing that not only had 25 sexist laws to be changed, but also inferring that even the chiefs were no longer safe in their positions since their rule could now be challenged by their oldest sisters (Brown 1992:7).

For women's rights movements internationally, the Unity Dow case was "what women's human rights are all about"<sup>4</sup> and the local press congratulated women for having "made their mark felt in their quest for equal rights", and advised them to feel encouraged to "challenge gender apartheid" (Moloi 1991; Radithokwa 1993). But victory turned into concern, worry and outrage in February 1993, when the *Botswana Gazette* reported that the government "is considering amending the Constitution to entrench gender discrimination". The article stated that the Ministry of Home Affairs was "said to have advised the government to hold a referendum to seek people's views on changing the Constitution".<sup>5</sup> Even though the government did not confirm the rumour, the paper's editor and executive member of *Emang*, Ohlsen, claimed to have been in possession of a government memorandum on the matter.<sup>6</sup> Not getting any response from the ministry or the government, she went public with the rumour and so did the women's organisation she was part of.

A press conference called by *Emang* and other women's organisations also attracted men who warned about "the damage to Botswana's good name if such a referendum were held" (James 1993), a contention that was repeated by prominent columnists in the local press (Molebeledi 1993; Ramsay 1993:20). Government officials continued then and later to neither confirm nor deny the allegations causing further uncertainty. In an article provocatively headed "Are we Women or Children?" Athalia Molekomme, an executive member of *Emang*, was reported to have been "fearful of the speed with which government can

1. *The Women's Watch (International Women's Rights Watch)*, 5, 5, 1991.

2. *Ibid.*; Rembe 1991.

3. Quoted in Segwai 1990.

4. *The Women's Watch*, 5, 1, 1991.

5. 'Anti-Women Law May be Coming. Labour Ministry urges Referendum', *Botswana Gazette*, 3 February 1993.

6. Interview, Gaborone, 7 January 1994.

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move if it feels strongly about something. We are dealing with an angry government.”<sup>1</sup> In March a delegation of representatives of four women’s organisations together with Lady Khama, the British born wife of the first president who was not known to have been an ardent gender activist, presented Masire with a petition suggesting that it was not democratic to hold a referendum on a basic human right.<sup>2</sup>

In November that year, the *Botswana Gazette* believed that the “intense opposition from some local women’s organisations and the international community” had “stopped the ministry dead in its tracks”. There was no action on the referendum, but there was also no amendment of the citizenship act (Mokone 1993). It was only in 1995 that news of such changes came to be reported (Mokone 1995).

The women’s movements, *Emang Basadi* most prominent amongst them, had not only won a victory, but had also learned a lesson: successfully challenging laws was not sufficient to guarantee gender equality. The threatened referendum, real or not, clearly established that the government could have succeeded in changing the constitution on the basis of a referendum. The consultations of the Law Commission had made evident that the government was able to sway the opinion of rural populations by the way matters were presented. It was therefore necessary for the gender lobby to reach rural people, and to fortify them with education about the meaning of laws and constitutional rights. But the events also brought home to the women’s movement that they needed political representation in decision-making to be able to prevent similar moves of the government in the future.

Thus *Emang Basadi*, as did women’s organisations elsewhere in Africa, moved from advancing legal reform to advancing women’s representation in politics, taking the 1994 General Election as a starting point:

With the referendum we were like shaken, that now we must do what we had been contemplating [lobbying for political representation]. I think that in southern Africa or most of sub-Saharan Africa, the tendency has been to treat the women as if somebody should help them or the government should do this or that for women. And now women are saying: Now we have to be there, and you guys shouldn’t just go into parliament and decide that we give this much for women. Now we want to be amongst the people who are deciding how much we should get.<sup>3</sup>

Like the NWLG in Zambia, *Emang Basadi*, understood itself as non-partisan, aiming at supporting women’s participation in politics across party lines. The new tasks of the organisation were defined as raising “awareness of and preparedness to seriously address women’s issues by politicians, decision makers and the public at large”, for a more balanced representation of women in government and parliament” and a greater appreciation of the right and ability of women to stand for office”. Its activities, which also prominently included the

1. *Motswana Woman*, April 1993, p. 9.

2. ‘Women see Masire over rights’, *Botswana Gazette*, 24 March 1993.

3. Interview, Windhoek, 7 January 1994.

drawing up of a Women's Manifesto were identical with other such networks in the region.<sup>1</sup>

When the organisation started on its political education campaign *Emang* goals met with considerably less opposition than they had in Zambia, perhaps because democracy had prepared the ground better. But its members were also questioned about their non-partisan position, particularly from women within the political parties. In fact, one commentator felt that opposition from the women's wings was stronger than from the main parties: "there was the problem of women trying to prevent other women from attending".<sup>2</sup> Women politicians, in turn, repeated the complaint of their sisters in Zambia, feeling that *Emang* was not really helping them by staying outside party politics. Instead they expected the organisation's members to lobby for them within their parties. For *Emang* this demand was unacceptable:

What do they think we should have done? Vote for them in their primaries? You see in *Emang* you find women who are in the BDP, working with women who are in the BNF, and women who are in the BPP. Now if the BDP women draw us into their thing we will alienate the BNF women. We are not saying that *Emang* is not a political organisation, we are in politics, I consider myself to be in politics, but not in partisan politics, that is the difference.<sup>3</sup>

*Emang* members expected that women politicians should be more aggressive within their own parties, and that they should be contesting primaries, while women politicians complained that *Emang* members were sitting on the fence, avoiding the frustrations of politics, yet having high expectations of women politicians. Women politicians also felt unfairly pressured by the women's movement to succeed against the odds and on their own and then to represent issues not defined by themselves but by the women's movement.

Thus even though the *Emang* political empowerment campaign was overall very successful (UNDP/The African-American Institute 1995:5) in attracting many aspiring women politicians from across the political spectrum in Botswana, the suspicions and mistrust between women politicians and gender activists did not entirely dissipate. Part of this mistrust, which surfaced in Zambia much more clearly, has in Botswana also been expressed in suspicions on the part of the political parties and candidates that *Emang* members themselves wanted to enter parliament, not via political competition, but via the reserved parliamentary seats by appointment of the president.

In both Zambia and Botswana the women's lobbies have suggested that these seats should be used as a way of bringing into parliament voices of women who were otherwise not heard. For *Emang* the reserved seats in parliament were one shortcut to bring into parliament highly gender conscious women to be "observers, to sort of try and see how the institution works. It would give us an opportunity to strategize to get women to participate".<sup>4</sup> For women politicians

1. Emang Basadi, 'Political Empowerment of Women. Emang Basadi's Women's programme for the 1994 General Elections', n.d. (mimeo).
2. Interview, Windhoek, 8 July 1994.
3. Interview, Gaborone, 7 July 1994.
4. Interview, Gaborone, 5 July 1994.

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it was a matter of gender activists wanting to enter politics without the inconvenience of political parties, and perhaps they were not far off the truth in the matter, if the opinion of one *Emang* member was representative: “I can never go into politics, to sing?”<sup>1</sup>

In the three cases reviewed here and in other countries and situations, such as in Tanzania, Kenya, and Malawi, autonomous women’s movements have moved during the 1990s away from the quasi-apolitical pursuits of the WID era towards more overtly political agendas. And even though they used different entry points and were moved in that direction by different circumstances their main impetus in all cases was a realisation that without political participation there would be no political representation. Yet, the inclusion of political aims in their agendas did not always help bridge the gap between members of the women’s movement and women in party politics. Perhaps this gap will never be surmounted entirely, since there will be need for an autonomous women’s movement located in civil society whose members will lobby about ever more pressing concerns, and there will be need for politicians who can be lobbied as members of the political parties who nominated them and who might or might not translate the demands of civil society into policy.

For the *Emang Basadi* member already quoted the situation presented itself thus:

I look at politics as a career and there are women who have chosen this career and who can do this work very well. I have chosen to be an academic, that is what I want to do. I would under no circumstances leave my university job and run in the council, because I am more effective here than there. At the same time I cannot say I am not in politics and leave out the possibility of assisting those who are already there, because I consider myself to be a resource... But physically becoming a politician, no!

The problem, perhaps, lies with vastly differing expectations, regarding motivation, representation and opportunity on both sides, which tend to ignore the realities and limitations of both groups. But by nature of operating within the perhaps most patriarchal domain of all, women politicians tend to be exposed to more limitations in pursuing both their career and gender specific interests. Gender activists in autonomous women’s organisations, of course, have identified these limitations perhaps even better than the politicians themselves, but this knowledge has not resulted in a more compassionate view of women politicians, former sisters included – somehow they always seem inadequate, co-opted, and complacent precisely because they are politicians.

1. Interview, Gaborone, 7 July 1994.

## CHAPTER 7

## Struggling on All Fronts

### *Women Politicians*

Women politicians have to deal with a myriad of constraints, within political parties, in governments and in their relationships to their constituents. Many of these constraints relate to perceptions that consider women's presence in politics as an anomaly imposing on them conflicting and contradictory expectations. The criteria used to judge them are exclusively applied to women only, seemingly deemed irrelevant to define men's qualifications as politicians, and they centre on male defined notions of morality on the one hand and a questioning of professionalism and integrity on the other. Moreover, expectations have multiplied, diversified and intensified since women's movements have started to regard women politicians as gatekeepers of their engagement with the state. As women politicians are gaining in confidence, and they are questioning the patriarchal values imbued in many political institutions, the constraints imposed on them are changing.

Women initially entered political parties and government in the context of clearly defined rules and expectations set by men. As members of women's wings they accepted that, were they admitted into positions of political power, this power was to be applied to a limited range of social issues only and certainly not to question the supremacy of men or the values it was based on. While women politicians thus occupied an unusual place they minimised undue attention by embracing exaggerated traditional role patterns. This and the fact that women entered politics without undue aspirations to be promoted beyond clearly defined limits simplified matters for them and the male establishment.

The democratic opening encouraged different women with different ambitions to enter political parties and governments. Opposed to women's wings they expected to be part of mainstream politics and to do their share in realising a new political culture of accountability, democracy and people centred policies which new political parties and movements promised to embrace. But they soon realised that even though political systems had changed, patriarchal structures and attitudes had not. Politically ambitious and outspoken women politicians were still ridiculed, taunted as prostitutes, and constantly questioned about their abilities to cope with their roles as politicians, wives and mothers. They still had to deal with powerful male gatekeepers who favoured the women's league type of women politician and tried to block the career advancement of those women they considered as deviating from that ideal.

In addition, the new interest of the women's movement in securing representation in decision-making not only gave rise to Lobby Groups and Women's Coalitions that advocated women's political representation, but it also imposed

new expectations on women politicians to use their political power to further gender equality goals, particularly as defined by women's movements. Women politicians have thus found themselves between a rock and a hard place, facing serious problems both within their political parties and in their relationship to women's movements. Parties have not appreciated their female members setting their own agenda particularly when it clashes with the party line, and gender has never been a favourite subject of party whips. Women's movements, by contrast, have expressed disappointment and contempt when women politicians have put the party line above sisterhood, or when they have chosen to represent constituencies composed of men, women and children, rather than educated, professional women with feminist aspirations only.

In addition to having to negotiate both feminist and patriarchal expectations of behaviour, as well as private and public lives, all of which tend to present themselves as mutually exclusive, women politicians have to learn the logistics of being active party members, political candidates with campaigns to run, and parliamentarians. As "outsiders" and as a minority they have drawn inordinate amounts of attention, where mistakes have been magnified into incompetence and expectations of excellence have been almost impossible to fulfil.

The negotiation of political rules on the one hand and conflicting aspirations to on the other have become easier through strength in numbers and in political parties with explicit policies on gender equality, such as within the ANC in South Africa, but conflicts have not been absent there either.

**Being the centre of attention:  
*Between moral rectitude and professionalism***

In Zambia a young MMD provincial coordinator, who had joined MMD in the run-up to the first multiparty elections in 1991 and stood as their parliamentary candidate in a rural UNIP stronghold, found herself the centre of attraction, so much so that "they even follow you when you go to the toilet":

I had a lot of character assassination. As provincial coordinator I have to be on the spot welcoming visiting dignitaries. Well, for most of the men you are a prostitute when you leave home in the night to wait at the hotel or the airport. Some men tried to refuse taking orders...it took a long time for men to accept my position.<sup>1</sup>

Another young Zambian politician complained:

When you are a woman there are just too many rules. They look at the way you dress and it becomes an issue, the way you express yourself becomes an issue, or how you relate to other men...you cannot be yourself...For me, in my position, I cannot choose who I talk to...because of my age and sex. And you find that if I talk to many men, people start to talk... because of my age that has been on the top of the agenda. Total attention!<sup>2</sup>

But older women politicians have had the same experiences, like this deputy minister in Zimbabwe who believed that "you have to be absolutely spotless – much more than you should really". On social occasions:

1. Interview, Lusaka, 20 January 1994.

2. Interview, Lusaka, 25 January 1994.

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You have to make sure that you do not entertain a man on his own, unless there are two, three or more. Not that I think anything can happen but men always construe...if they get a woman by herself it is for THAT purpose only. But you cannot be saying I do not care, you cannot be reckless.<sup>1</sup>

Most women politicians could add examples to this list of rules. In South Africa, where the number of women politicians reached a critical mass and a diversity of backgrounds and ages mitigated against simple stereotyping, appearance was still an issue in the mid-1990s. Jessie Duarte, then a member of the Gauteng provincial legislature, claimed in an article in the *Sunday Times* that the South African media single out women politicians for caricature. Judging women on their sexuality and morality rather than their intellect, journalists, she claimed, got distracted from political achievements “by the size of my feet and the colour of my toenail polish”.<sup>2</sup>

Some parliaments, such as in Zambia and in Zimbabwe, enforced dress regulations for women MPs which proved hard to comply with. In Zambia short sleeved or short dresses as well as pants were deemed objectionable attire for women members. In 1995 Inonge Lewanika’s bare arms were made the subject of a point of order, to which the Speaker responded that “arms are all right. What we are concerned about are the legs.” That women could not hide their legs in trousers, however, was exemplified a few days later in the same place, when the Speaker ordered another women MP who was wearing “slacks” to change her attire because he took “strong exception to women who prefer to dress in men’s clothes”.<sup>3</sup> The new South African parliament took an exceptionally liberal approach to parliamentary dress, mainly through the initiative of the Speaker, Frene Ginwala, but what women members wore, and how they arranged their hair, were still the talk of town, and fellow male MPs. One National Party MP took exception to the fact that her male party colleagues tended to treat her looks as her prime identifying characteristic, introducing her to others as “our pretty girl”. While such an attitude might not have astonished NP circles where women MPs have always been “our little roses” such tactics also hit ANC women MPs from within their own ranks, when they received notes commenting on their looks and attire while they made contributions to the house.<sup>4</sup>

The effects of sexual innuendo and snide remarks about appearance have been exacerbated by the fact that women politicians often find their qualifications and job performance belittled, as women or as politicians or both. Women cabinet ministers could be treated “like a flirt” or mistaken for secretaries by their male staff. Sexual harassment by male colleagues was also common (Ferguson and Ludwig 1995a:17).<sup>5</sup> A deputy minister in Zimbabwe explained part of the problem was that women failed to command the respect of men:

1. Interview, Harare, 17 February 1994.
2. *Sunday Times*, 14 March 1999.
3. Quoted in Sifuniso 1998:213.
4. Quoted in Gina Ulyse, ‘In Their Own Words: Persistent Patriarchies Across Parties: Some Notes on Manoeuvring in Parliament’, *Women and Election 1999*, [www.women'snet.org.za/election/gina](http://www.women'snet.org.za/election/gina).
5. South African Press Association, ‘Women leaders must break the legacy of silence’, 29 May 1998.

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My uncle is a gardener, when he walks into my office my driver will stand up automatically. When I walk in they just say 'good afternoon' and stay seated. They look at me like a mother and a woman and they just could [not stand up for me].<sup>1</sup>

That many men apply the standards valid in their home to the workplace was also observed by Margaret Dongo. The youngest and one of the most outspoken MPs in Zimbabwe throughout the 1990s, she had to remind male MPs that she was "not a wife but a working colleague".<sup>2</sup> An older women politician in Zambia also experienced male colleagues treating her as they would their wife at home: "They think 'Ah, a woman, like my wife' – so there is no respect. You have to stand firm [and tell them] this is the office, housewives are at home."<sup>3</sup> But the separation between home and work that seems to present no problems for men, does not work easily for women.

Thenjiwe Mtinso found that in the new South African parliament in 1994 men had, despite their rhetoric to the contrary, no understanding of the institution as being non-gendered because the separation between private and public they were making was artificial:

One of the things that was suggested was that you have to make a choice if you wanted to be a mother or you wanted to be a politician, and these things seemed to be incompatible. And yet, they were compatible for men because they had these wives locked up somewhere to look after these children. Because I cannot say that as a mother I lock myself up, and now I come here in the parliament again. But what was clear, what was being told, just like in MK, if you wanted to be a parliamentarian, get into the *status quo*, be a man. So once again you had to be an honorary man to make it.<sup>4</sup>

But in MK and in other liberation armies, women were elevated to "honorary men" only as long as it suited men and 'honorary men' could easily be demoted to being mere women again when it came to promotion, or the distribution of tasks. Politics offers similar contradictions to women where they have to be seen "being a good mother and a good wife, and on the other hand I have to be seen to be a very good politician. It does not work."<sup>5</sup> How little it worked was witnessed in Zambia by Lucy Sichone when she was UNIP Secretary of Legal and Political Affairs after the 1991 elections. When she contributed during central committee meetings, her colleagues tried to remind her that she was "just a woman" and in the same breath they admonished her for not behaving like a woman but rather like a man.<sup>6</sup> The first and only woman cabinet minister in the 1991 MMD government, by contrast, found that when she opened her mouth in cabinet meetings her male colleagues laughed, apparently because she was too timid. Her situation changed when two more forceful and "tough" women cabinet ministers, who knew the art of acting like men, joined her.<sup>7</sup>

Also in Zambia, Inonge Lewanika mentioned above, a qualified medical doctor with international experience, was as interim chairperson of the National

1. Interview, Harare, 21 July 1995.
2. Interview, Harare, 18 February 1994.
3. Interview, Lusaka, 1 February 1994.
4. Interview, Cape Town, 19 May 1995.
5. Interview, Harare, 16 February 1994.
6. Interview, Lusaka, 20 January 1994.
7. Interview, Lusaka, 17 January 1994.

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Party accused of not being a fit leader because she apparently had failed as a wife 20 years earlier when she and her husband obtained a divorce.<sup>1</sup> That many of the male leaders who accused her were divorced and had re-married several times over was not considered important (Mbikusita-Lewanika 1998:160). Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe also felt moved to equate single women with immoral women, when he expressed disappointment with the leadership of the Women's League elected in 1999, because none of them was married at the time.<sup>2</sup> Knowing the rules, a Zambian councillor who intended to stand as parliamentary candidate in the 1995 national elections felt her chances of winning would be improved by a proper husband-child set up:

Because that is one of the things they want to use on you: 'She is not married.' They probably come up with saying 'She is never capable of getting married!' and in African tradition that is taboo – it is your job as a woman to get married. And children... it works on me, I am hoping to have a child by the next election. One is alright... as long as it is one. You have to prove that you can be a mother.<sup>3</sup>

But that having a child and no husband was not sufficient in Zambia either was exemplified by the snide criticism directed at a women cabinet minister after the 1991 elections, who was considered immoral because she was the single mother of a child. That she also had a university degree complementing her portfolio did not mitigate her apparent failings in the family department.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, if women politicians have children and demand that the work environment be adapted to the restrictions imposed on them by child-care, they can be blamed for wanting their bread buttered on both sides. This happened when South Africa's new women MPs demanded that child-care facilities be introduced to parliament.<sup>5</sup>

Many of the women who entered parliament in South Africa in 1994 were single mothers, but while nobody dared pick this up as disqualifying them, they did not escape the contradictions between competence and motherhood either. While one politician had to have her feet scrutinised others were challenged as unfeminine. The Media Monitoring Project concluded in 1999 that women politicians had been characterised as "ruthless, belligerent and doggedly determined" positive attributes in men but apparently not in women. Nkosazana Zuma, a medical doctor and then the Minister of Health, for example, has been credited with important though often unpopular and controversial policies. She was in turn described as being "frumpy" "matronly" and called "the nanny", apparently on account of her appearance, and criticised as being "obstinate", "arrogant", and "stubborn". For the media project her being likened to a "domestic worker" belittled her qualifications, while being labelled aggressive criticised her for being one of the most effective cabinet ministers in the Mandela government (Media Monitoring Project 1999:164–166).

1. Zambia National Broadcasting Cooperation, 'Night Line.' 28 September 1993.
2. *Zimbabwe Independent*, 10 September 1999.
3. Interview, Lusaka, 4 February 1994.
4. Interview, Lusaka, 4 February 1994.
5. Interview, Cape Town, 19 May 1995.

South African journalists' art of hitting women politicians below the belt was also expressed in a news report in 1998, reporting on a commission of inquiry into the alleged misappropriation of state funds by Mpumalanga provincial parliamentary deputy speaker Cynthia Maropeng. Rather than focusing on the substance of the allegations of having misappropriated travel advances, the headline ran: "Mpuma speaker uses state funds for pantyhose and baby-cream."<sup>1</sup> The press could not have managed to discredit and ridicule her more, one feels.

Zuma and Maropeng were not the only women politicians who came up against the home and job divide. In 1996 two articles appeared in two South African magazines with a largely black readership which suggested that women did not really belong in parliament. *Ebony South Africa* ran an article about the "surprising things [women MPs] do to work off stress", featuring capable women doing their routine of Yoga, exercises, and meditating in their offices between meetings and even "dancing through the corridors of power", in order to deal with the hardships of being in office and to "keep their heads above the water at a great cost to their personal well-being". Photos of the MPs engaged in stress relief accompanied the article.<sup>2</sup> Two months later *Bona* followed this expose up with a feature, sponsored by a margarine manufacturer, under the title of "Exclusive: Our Women in Parliament Cook for Us. Special Winter Recipes from Parliament", which placed women MPs even more firmly back behind the stove, an easier concept to deal with for many South Africans.<sup>3</sup> One is left to wonder how readers would have reacted if male politicians were featured with their girlfriends or in bars relieving stress or offering readers their favourite recipes for warming up in winter.

As if to mitigate that firm positioning of women MPs the same magazine ran another article a month later, where a women senator from Swaziland (Hlanze and Khabela 1998)<sup>4</sup> explained to South African women that "all mothers can be politicians" because for mothers "it takes the ability to rule in order to provide, organise, manage and run homes the way most mothers do" and because "modesty, whereby women have continue (sic) to provide and sacrifice even when they do not get the deserved credit for their excellent managerial skills, adds to good qualities (sic) of a politician" (Hlatshwayo 1996:64–65). One was left to wonder if men, by virtue of their lack of managerial skills and sacrifices in the domestic department make politicians with bad qualities.

That women politicians often do not get the credit they deserve is, of course, true, but it can hardly be twisted into a virtue. That they, like many other professional women, have to manage multiple roles was not only exploited by journalists as a weakness. Family, friends and husbands might well hit the same nerve. In the 1950s women needed the approval of their husbands to enter politics and this very often was still true in the 1990s, even in South Africa. The majority of women politicians across the region attested to the fact that the

1. South African Press Association, 'Mpuma Speaker Uses State Funds for Pantyhose and Baby Cream', 25 May, 1998.
2. 'Behind the Scenes with Women in Parliament', *Ebony South Africa*, May 1996, pp. 54 ff.
3. *Bona*, July 1996, pp. 49–62.
4. The authors suggest that Swaziland is by far the least gender advanced member of SADC.

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approval of their husbands or partners was the *sine qua non* of their careers, and many suggested that politics was something better embarked on by women after children had grown up. If partners did not offer full support, marriages were destabilised, and divorces would follow. In South Africa the media claimed in 1997 that parliament was a “house of heartbreak” because thirty marriages broke down on account of women entering parliament during the first year alone. According to insiders, however, many divorces were due more to the fact that parliament had empowered the women sufficiently so that they escaped from oppressive marriages (Parker 1997:26 ff) rather than the supposed incompatibility of the women’s career choice in politics and leading a harmonious family life.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, many husbands of women politicians find it hard to cope with their wives’ elevated public status and unspecified working hours, developing instead jealous suspicions and resorting to constant accusations or even violence. South African Thandi Modise, a former MK cadre and an ANC MP, revealed publicly in 1995 that her husband, also a prominent ANC figure, tormented her at home, not allowing her even to make phone calls. That she revealed her domestic problems was, moreover, considered problematic not only by the husband but also by others who “are ashamed on my behalf that I opened my mouth because I am a leader, and leaders are not supposed to acknowledge problems” (Brümmer 1995).

Modise was not the only woman who experienced that the empowerment she experienced as a politician stopped at the front door of the marital home because “when you go in you are no longer an MP, you are WIFE!”<sup>2</sup> The testimonies of women MPs in Zambia in the mid-nineties, who almost to a person agreed that “most women who become active in politics experience marital problems” and the wisdom of a Zimbabwean minister who suggested that “you either have a broken marriage and you want to progress, or if you want to progress you have to break up your family” seem to suggest that the experience was widespread in the region (Ferguson and Ludwig 1995a:18).<sup>3</sup> Women politicians in local government politics, where the pressures of work are perhaps not as pressing and the position as councillor is certainly less glamorous, reported similar problems.<sup>4</sup>

Leaving small children in the care of partners and housekeepers most of their waking hours adds to the conflicts between career and the expected roles women politicians have to cope with when parliamentary work-schedules last into the night. Former ANC MP Jenny Schreiner decided to register her protest over working hours by leaving parliament every day at five in the afternoon, meeting or not, to spend time with her small son whose single parent she was (Davis 1995a). Her colleague Mtinso was also critical about the working hours, suggesting that some MPs seemed to believe that decisions made late in the

1. Also compare Britton 2002.

2. Maviavi Manzini quoted on IDASA and Westminster Institute, ‘Second Anniversary of Parliament: The view from inside. Women MPs in the corridors of power’. Audio Casette, Cape Town 1996.

3. Interview, Harare, 17 February 1994.

4. Interview, Windhoek, December 1998.

evening were better than those made during regular working hours, and that working late was a sign of their immense importance. She also felt uncomfortable having to shift responsibilities as a woman to other women, a nanny or a housekeeper, denying that person the opportunity to spend time with her own children.<sup>1</sup> Other women MPs had been forced to line up two shifts of housekeepers to have their children cared for. Working hours in the South African parliament have been reduced since, ostensibly not to enable MPs to have time with their families but because “going beyond 6 pm had serious budgetary implications”, such as the supply of extra transport and overtime payments to administrative and support staff.<sup>2</sup>

A conference of all women parliamentarians held shortly after the inauguration of the South African 1994 parliament ended a discussion about the specific problems of dealing with demanding careers as women parliamentarians and demanding families, with the ironic conclusion that, like their male colleagues, they would “need wives” to cope. In 1999, deputy speaker Baleka Mbete-Kgot-sitsile, still joked that the question of how to provide women MPs with wives had not been solved yet (Powers 1994; Haffajee 1999). However, despite the reality of double roles and unequal burdens women MPs have to deal with, they believed that such problems should not detract from their achievements. Naledi Pandor, a former ANC MP in South Africa’s parliament, was bitter about the preoccupations of journalists:

The things they always ask is ‘Are you stressed? Do you have to choose between home and parliament and does that make you unhappy?’ I mean, I really do so much work and such a range, somehow that is not recognised. My daily life is not just about a home and parliament.

I quarrel with [the assumption that women have more problems than men]. They do not ask such questions to my husband. Like does he get to do all the things he wants to do now that Naledi is never home? So they ask me while poor Sharif – my friends would not like me saying that – is looking after the children...he could be asked if he has stress too?<sup>3</sup>

It is indeed interesting to note that while stress levels and marital problems of women politicians were major foci of attention, the “man behind every successful woman” had not been born yet, as journalism happily dealt with “cabinet wives”<sup>4</sup> but had failed to focus on “cabinet husbands”.

#### Getting nominated and promoted: *Negotiating gatekeepers in political parties*

“Cabinet husbands” and “women MPs’ wives” aside, most women politicians concurred in the 1990s that they not only had many more responsibilities than men to negotiate but also that they had to work much harder in order to be accepted as politicians.<sup>5</sup> In the BDP in Botswana women were mainly situated at the lower party levels, and promotion for them is only possible after fifteen and

1. Interview, Cape Town, 19 May 1995.
2. South African Press Association, ‘No more late nights for MPs and parliamentary staff’, 25 May 1998.
3. Interview, Cape Town, 22 March 1996.
4. See for example Boswell 1994.
5. Interviews and compare Ferguson and Ludwig 1995a:18.

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more years of dedicated, selfless party work. Men were shown to need no such record, but instead they were free to join a political party and stand for office immediately, even if “he has no claim to political knowledge or experience he can stand and get elected, merely because he is seen as a father figure, a figure of authority”.<sup>1</sup>

Part of the heavier workload of women is that they tend to take on more work than men and that they do not delegate. When they entered South Africa’s parliament in 1994 women MPs found that even though men and women had similar problems adjusting to parliamentary work men were better at it, because they were much more used to getting others to do work for them such as claiming secretarial services much more readily. Women by comparison tried to cope alone until they could hardly see their desk for paperwork.<sup>2</sup> More than women’s modesty might have been involved, however. The Women Empowerment Unit in South African parliament found that many women did not “understand how parliament is organised and do not know how to access or use its support structures”. The unit’s 1998 report also suggested that the unequal power relations between male and female MPs might have created a bias against women in the allocation of scarce support services offered to parliamentarians (Carter 1998). Initially the South African parliament had only 12 committee clerks for 60 committees and one secretary for 37 MPs (Davis 1995), and MPs in other countries could rely on even fewer support services. Thus all too often women do not have the choice of availing themselves of help, since none is offered.

This has been particularly true with women’s political careers, where the odds have been stacked against them as they are expected to help men and forgo their own ambitions in men’s favour. Making their way up the party ladder can be a lonely and often frustrating experience for women, even if they have the support of constituencies. If they are able and willing to contest primary elections they face selection processes that are arbitrary and often not very democratic. In Zambia,<sup>3</sup> Botswana and Zimbabwe highly qualified and popular women have not been adopted as candidates in the 1990s even though they had won the primaries.

A faithful ZANU(PF) women member had been persuaded by a Harare constituency to stand as their parliamentary candidate. She had agreed after initial misgivings, and she went ahead and spent her few savings on her campaign for the party primaries and she won against the sitting MP, a man. When she went with her supporters to register as the ZANU candidate she was told that the registration forms were faulty, apparently because some names were spelled wrong. When she lodged a complaint with her party, after she realised that the sitting MP was already waiting at the registrar’s office with his registration papers, this brought her no luck. Nobody cared even when the constituency staged protests and boycotted party rallies featuring the “new” old candidate. Her loyalty to the party prevented her from taking the matter further, but she knew that she had

1. BDP member quoted in Kimble and Molekomme 1985:10–11.

2. Interview, Cape Town, 18 March 1996, and Ruth Mompoti quoted in ‘Behind the scenes with women in parliament’, *Ebony South Africa*, May 1996, p. 56.

3. Interview, Lusaka, 4 February 1994.

won the primaries and that her competitor sat in parliament as a result of fraud. She was never told why the party had dropped her, nor was she the only rejected woman candidate who lent her energies to the campaign of dishonest competitors since the victory of the party came before personal victory – for women at least.<sup>1</sup>

A central committee member of the BNF in Botswana also experienced men being so protective of their own advantage in primary elections, that should they “get to know that there is a woman running for any part of the ward or constituency, boy, then they come up”. She knew what she was talking about, because

... the moment I intimated that I was going to stand, the man who looks after the primary elections picked up the phone and called colleagues in order to mobilise people not to vote for me. The atmosphere in the party was also bad, the man I had been standing against had been in the party and the constituency for a long time and I could tell that I was resented. So I withdrew because I knew that I was going to lose.

She also withdrew in the spirit of a loyal party supporter because “winning in an atmosphere like that would mean campaigning against the party”.<sup>2</sup> A women member of the BDP in the same country, who lost the primaries for council and parliamentary nominations under suspicious circumstances, blamed the electoral colleges whose task it is to nominate candidates. She believed that given the small number of members of the colleges, prospective candidates have to start influencing its composition and its members five years in advance of wanting to contest and win primaries.<sup>3</sup>

Men have advantages in currying favours too, since they often have better connections, more campaign funds and fewer inhibitions about buying votes. Susan Masuku who stood as a candidate for the Zambia Democratic Congress (ZDC) in the 1996 parliamentary elections found out that people in her constituency wanted to be paid, and eventually they supported a candidate who was able and willing to do so.<sup>4</sup> Many women candidates are so poor they lead their campaigns on foot or bicycle unable to even buy food for their campaign managers. When Inonge Lewanika crossed the floor from the ruling MMD to the National Party (NP) and had to defend her seat in a by-election, she found that “money seems to be more important than the quality of the candidate”. Supporters also expected her to hand out alcohol, a demand she refused to comply with (Mbikusita-Lewanika 1998:151).

Being accepted in primaries is thus difficult but success is no guarantee for the support of the party. Often women are only allowed to stand in constituencies that are in some way or another unattractive, be it that they are remote, underdeveloped or the stronghold of the opposition. Women candidates also attract less campaign funding and support, both from their parties and from business(wo)men, who tend not to consider women candidates worth the investment.

1. Interview, Harare, 18 July 1995; ‘Winner of ZANU(PF) primaries dumped’, *Herald*, 14 March 1995.
2. Interview, Gaborone, 5 July 1994.
3. Interview, Gaborone, 6 July 1994.
4. Quoted in National Women’s Lobby Group 1999:21.

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Lack of money is exacerbated by a lack of logistical support. In Zambia's 1991 parliamentary elections an MMD woman candidate who stood in a UNIP stronghold was constantly intimidated and threatened by UNIP supporters. Moreover, as a civil servant, UNIP threatened her with dismissal and harassed her with repeated job transfers. Her party colleagues were not concerned about the harassment she was suffering, and after she predictably lost the elections, MMD claimed to have no funds to support her court case against UNIP on harassment charges.<sup>1</sup>

During the same election campaign another woman candidate had been canvassing in her home area until she heard on the radio that her party had transferred her to another constituency she knew nothing about. She had to virtually "go looking for it", without funds, vehicle, or contacts at her disposal.<sup>2</sup> In fact only one of the sitting women MPs in Zambia could claim financial campaign support from her party in 1995, while all the others had to rely on their own resources and those of friends and family only. Explained one: "For women, politics is an isolating life. You are on your own and there are financial constraints and no logistical support" (Ferguson and Ludwig 1995a:17).

Some aspiring women candidates choose to stand as independents. Many do so after having been out-manoeuvred during party primaries or being expelled, or threatened with expulsion, from party membership. Rosemary Walubita of the MMD was in a 1992 by-election rejected as a parliamentary candidate in favour of another – unknown – woman candidate. When she contested the elections as an independent, she not only lost the elections but was also expelled from the party with 15 of her closest supporters.<sup>3</sup> For Charity Chola Mwansa, the first independent female member of the Zambian parliament, the fact that MMD had rejected her as a candidate against the wishes of the constituency and without a stated reason, heightened her resolve to enter politics as a career. As an independent candidate she was able to campaign on a platform of democracy and accountability which she, and her constituency, felt more comfortable with. As an independent MP she felt she did not get "caught up in collective decisions which she might not agree with" even though "the majority always win in a democracy" (Nalumango 1998:181 and 196).

One of the most famous women MPs in the region in the 1990s was, no doubt, Margaret Dongo in Zimbabwe. A ZANU(PF) MP from 1990 to 1995, Dongo started her career at the centre of ZANU(PF) as a member of the central committee and with positions in the President's Office and the Central Intelligence Organisation. As the youngest MP and one of the most critical ones she consistently defended democratic values against the Mugabe government and she criticised the creation of a de facto one-party state. When she stood for nomination as MP in her Harare constituency in 1995, the party rigged the primary elections in favour of another woman candidate, an old woman friend of Dongo's, who had been positioned against her by the party. After a number of men had refused to stand against her, the party had tried to "catch a friend with

1. Personal information, Siavonga, Zambia, February 1992; Interview, Lusaka, 24 January 1994.

2. Interview, Lusaka, 30 January 1994.

3. *Times of Zambia*, 12 August and 30 September 1992.

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a best friend”, approaching her woman friends in the party to stand against her. Vivian Mwashita, it seemed, agreed: “Poor Vivian – they used her”:<sup>1</sup>

They knew we were in the struggle, we used to run a nursery crèche together, and we were such best friends that if I would buy shoes and they were small I would pass them on. I do not know how she got the weakness of money. They bought her a house in that constituency. <sup>2</sup> A senior Cabinet minister is the father of at least one of her children and she thought the party heavies would do the work for her. She can’t speak for herself.<sup>3</sup>

Dongo decided to defy the party that no longer represented her values and stood as an independent. When she lost to her former friend, she had enough evidence of vote rigging to contest the election result in court arguing that the ruling party had manipulated the electoral process apparently with the connivance of the Registrar General. Amazingly, she won the court case, the election was annulled and a by-election held. Without fraud and with the support of her constituency and many others, she had no problems winning against Mwashita, who was described by one journalist rather unkindly as “a superannuated bridesmaid, favouring taffetas and satins in purple, pink and green”.<sup>4</sup> In an interview with the BBC Africa Service after winning her court case, she also explained her victory in terms of women’s rights:

I am very happy to say that being a woman and breaking the system after 15 years, challenging the abuse of women’s rights as an individual, is not a joke. In actual fact it is opening a door for other women so that they will be able to fight for their own rights.

In her five years as an independent MP, the only one amongst three opposition members, she continued to be the most vocal opposition Zimbabwe had seen until then<sup>5</sup> and she managed to inspire women not only in Zimbabwe but also in the region. But her victory against the monolithic ZANU(PF) also helped inspire a more forceful and viable opposition in Zimbabwe who *inter alia* created a backlash against women’s participation in political decision-making. The entry of the opposition into parliament after the June 2000 elections meant that Dongo lost her own seat which she contested as an independent, and that the number of women MPs declined as both the ruling party and opposition chose to field predominantly male candidates.

Dongo’s case perhaps explains why the majority of women politicians feel that standing as an independent might be possible in council elections but is too risky in parliamentary elections where parties are poised against each other much more strongly and people vote for parties rather than individual candidates. But the restrictions they face in political parties go beyond being nominated and elected.

1. Quoted in Spicer 1996.

2. Interview, Harare 20 July 1995.

3. Quoted in Spicer 1996.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Mary Braid, ‘Lone voice of opposition braves death threats for democracy’, *Independent on Sunday*, 3 May 1998.

**Influencing party policy:**  
*Negotiating gender and party whips*

The argument that women should gain equal representation in political parties and governments, has often been based not merely on a human rights approach but rested on the assumption that women will bring to politics specific interests that cannot be represented by men. It implies that the larger the number of women MPs the greater the representation of specific women's concerns and the more intense the impact on policies. The assumption that women politicians always represent specific women's interests is, however, far from the truth. The reasons can be found both in the inclinations of women MPs and in the restrictions set by party leaders.

With the exception of South Africa, perhaps, where a number of the women MPs who entered parliament in 1994 were leaders of women's organisations, women MPs often do not enter politics with a feminist agenda in mind, even if they develop a gender consciousness later. In Zambia many women "plunged into politics", to quote Inonge Lewanika, because they wished to contribute to a turn-around in the deplorable state of the Zambian economy at the turn of the decade. Angered by the excesses of the one-party state, and the mismanagement, nepotism and corruption that went with it, they joined the opposition movement, hoping that they could contribute to a more people centred political culture. That the MMD offered an opening to women and proclaimed gender equality goals was but one of the facets of that new political culture that attracted women.

For Lewanika "women did not feature prominently in my life. I found them uninteresting, trivial and too self-conscious in a negative manner" (Mbikusita-Lewanika 1998). When Clara Ohlsen rose in the BDP in Botswana, she "was not aware of women issues".<sup>1</sup> Fellow BDP women entered politics because they were the wives of MPs or because they chose politics as a career or profession, and in Zambia women politicians often had a background of growing up in political families. But even women who have entered politics as converted feminists have not always been willing to become exclusive gender advocates either. Already in April 1994, just prior to the elections, Thenjiwe Mtinso, one of the most outspoken gender activists in the ANC, suggested that the primary alliances of MPs were their political parties and programmes and that she therefore was going to parliament to raise the issues of the working class, and that she sometimes had "difficulties with this notion of sisterhood". And Brigitte Mabandla, then another ANC parliamentary candidate, suggested at the same time that she did not want to be ghettoised as a 'gender lobby' only (Gevisser 1994:5).

Women politicians generally resent being ghettoised as gender advocates. But they also know that "if you do not say it, it does not get said, so you start trying to ensure that you have spoken about the State first, and you tag on gender at the end of the sentence".<sup>2</sup> Given the prejudice they face in political parties

1. Interview, Gaborone, 7 January 1994.

2. Former South African MP, Jenny Schreiner, quoted by Connell 1998.

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and governments, speaking about gender only mitigates against their having to show their seriousness and dedication. Gender has never been considered a serious concern, and raising it exclusively has tended to marginalize women politicians recreating a women's wing within the mainstream. As long as gender issues are not considered important in the mainstream, the women who raise them remain stigmatised as being unprofessional.

Inonge Lewanika was in the mid-nineties known in the Zambian parliament as "woman and children" because almost every contribution she made concerned women and children. A fellow woman MP observed that sadly fellow MPs had stopped listening to her on account of this. For Lewanika herself, the fact that MPs kept quiet when she spoke was an indication that they were listening, "so the message to women really is that if you are serious and you know what you are talking about and you have confidence" it is possible to establish "that rapport with colleagues"<sup>1</sup>. Her colleague Edith Nawakwi, then the Minister of Energy, disagreed with her:

If you want to get far [as a politician] make it national issues. To me it is better to be gender-sensitive to my colleagues, make the issue clean and then I have 7 billion on my budget. They tried to leave me out. Then I went to the Minister of Finance and said: 'Look, you talk about national health. How are you going to do this without clean water?' But when I would have said that women are travelling seven kilometres to the well, they could not have used that as a reason for what I wanted. So I start with diarrhoea diseases, not with women. The biggest killer disease next to malaria! What is the problem? It is water!

What was important for Nawakwi, whose meteoric rise in the MMD government in the 1990s would attest to her success, was that she ran a ministry competently and that she was able to put her plans for that ministry across clearly:

Women have to prove themselves. We are working in a male environment. First they employ you, they think you are a woman, they treat you like that, until they find out that you can deliver. Then they rank you in another category. As a woman you have to get above [being treated like a woman].<sup>2</sup>

Her approach is reflected in many women politicians' strategy for success. Motsei Madisa, a gender activist and a central committee member of the BNF in Botswana, explained that she started being taken seriously when she

... refuse(d) to be a secretary of anything. They said: "Don't try to elect her to any secretariat, she is going to refuse." And I decided to get out of the women's wing, I would never hold a position there. I have been in the BNF for 15 years and I have not sung in a single choir. I made my position clear. Nobody expects it. Everybody in the party ignores that I am a woman. I was one of "those women" but they just do not bother any more.<sup>3</sup>

Madisa was satisfied that she was accepted as an honorary man who was able to change the party from within to be more gender responsive and to open the way for other women to enter the party mainstream, for example by pushing for the adoption of a gender quota.

One of the longest serving women MPs in Botswana, who entered parliament in 1974 and held ministerial positions, agreed that her colleagues and the

1. Interview, Lusaka, 4 February 1994.

2. Interview, Lusaka, 4 February 1994.

3. Interview, Gaborone, 8 July 1994.

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public no longer saw her as a woman but “they take me as another person”. She admitted that “as a woman you are constantly conscious of the fact that you are a woman. You are playing into their hands.” That is, perhaps, why she did not go out of her way to speak for women, unless “it is something that is unfavourable to them, just because they are women”.<sup>1</sup> She, like other women politicians, was very conscious that the acceptance that hard work and ‘being a man’ could produce was ultimately very fragile:

Once you are accepted they forget your gender, but when you make a mistake, they are sure to remember your gender! Whereas when a man makes a mistake, he is a silly man, just that one, not all men. But if a woman makes a mistake, then it is all women.<sup>2</sup>

It is because women politicians are allowed in decision-making on men’s suffering, that those who make it to acceptance, turning into “that one”, do not like to rock the boat. An aspiring BDP parliamentary candidate, who had been frustrated by not making it through the hurdle of the primaries elaborated clearly:

Women in parliament – if you have to work for your respect you do not just go there like some women’s activist and speak on women’s issues only – there are women, men and children, and there is a lot to be done for children. You cannot just go to parliament and speak about women only. We have to be very diplomatic and balance what we are addressing, for it to be accepted. Because I do not think that here in Botswana you go and challenge these men too much. You cannot succeed. I know how my mother talked to get around her husband, and men can be nice if you know how to play the game. Respect... You have to know how to play your cards well, and you have to know when to use pressure.<sup>3</sup>

Dependence on the goodwill and acceptance of party bosses increases when competition for the positions is strong or when MPs do not have constituencies to back them. Competition for government positions has, for example, been very strong in Botswana where there are only 40 seats in parliament. And when younger men or a new crop of opposition members are trying to wrest positions from established parliamentarians, women fare even worse. The Zimbabwe elections in 2000 are an example of this, as were the 1991 elections in Zambia.

Electoral systems based on party lists and proportional representation rather than on first past the post constituency systems give women a better chance of being nominated, and create less resistance to the application of gender quotas. In constituency or ward based single candidate systems women are often held to be a liability for the party, a feeling that does not come to the surface as strongly in list systems where the vote is determined by characteristics of political parties rather than individual candidates. Yet, party lists and quotas might also represent disadvantages for all MPs, and perhaps women in particular. Commentators in South Africa have pointed out that the electoral system there

... has served us well in ensuring that minorities are well represented in Parliament, but it tends to make MPs, of whatever party, more answerable to their party bosses and less to us voters than is healthy. [...] It does so primarily by placing MPs’ seats almost entirely within the gift of party leaders. (Barrel 1999)

1. Interview, Gaborone, 25 February 1994.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Interview, Gaborone, 6 July 1994.

This, a number of MPs have suggested makes them prone to coercion or manipulation from the party centre, because they cannot usefully back their opposition to party policy with reference to the pressure of the constituency. Without a popular base in a constituency MPs might be even more compelled to toe the party line to ensure their political survival.

Women might be subjected to such pressures more readily, particularly, but not only, in parties that do not embrace gender equality goals. A member of the South African NP, for example, clearly stated that because her party was very male-dominated career developments were restricted for women, particularly for those who were “not going with the flow” and were marked as “a difficult woman or a fighter – n’kwaai vrou, a fierce woman”.<sup>1</sup> Another NP member of parliament who had entered the NP led parliament in 1987 backed by the NP’s women’s section, preferred the contestation of seats in constituencies to the list system because to get onto the NP party list, “the party bosses had to smile on you favourably”.<sup>2</sup> Even the ANC leadership, which had included 30 and 37 per cent women in the 1994 and 1999 elections respectively, could – like the opposition parties who did not have gender quotas – use discretion as to where to place the selected women on the list.

The positioning on the party list has often shown biases against women because candidates who are recognised as active and outspoken gender activists were not always favoured in the selection for the top positions on lists, from which members of the cabinet are most likely to be drawn. Activists have suggested that the women who appeared at the top of the ANC list for the 1999 election, for example, were not all amongst the most active in integrating gender into their work, and that some of the best-known and active gender advocates were placed in lower positions (Coetzee 1999). This would suggest that even in parties that are officially committed to gender equality goals, “taking up gender issues is not the best way for a woman to increase her mobility within the party”.<sup>3</sup>

It is perhaps for these reasons that many women politicians have not been so keen to be appointed to special reserved seats. One of the “specially elected MPs” in Botswana took the first chance of a constituency based seat falling empty to resign “because I wanted to campaign and win. I wanted to have a constituency”:

I did not want to feel that I was there because somebody asked me to be there. I wanted to feel that I was elected by the people. And so they did. [...] They elected me five times now and I hope to get in again.<sup>4</sup>

One of her colleagues in the same party expressed even more forceful objections to the same issue even though or because she had not made it through parliamentary and council primaries:

If you are a woman and you are just sitting there and waiting for your quota, if we are just sitting in our houses and waiting for the president to nominate us...even the guys who are

1. Quoted in Gina Ulysse, ‘In Their Own Words: Persistent Patriarchies Across Parties: Some Notes on Manoeuvring in Parliament’, *Women and Election 1999*, [www.womensnet.org.za/election/gina](http://www.womensnet.org.za/election/gina).
2. Interview, Cape Town, 19 March 1996.
3. *epoliticsSA*, 18, 7 July 2000 (published by IDASA, South Africa).
4. Interview, Gaborone, 25 February 1994.

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nominated, other guys do not respect them. You have come in through the backdoor and for the five years [until the next election] you will be taunted [...] it would do nobody a service. How can these women act if they have to be forever grateful to these guys? Being elected is more honourable.<sup>1</sup>

And a former woman MP in the post-1991 Zambian parliament observed of her nominated fellow women MPs:

It is like they felt grateful to the men that they had been given these positions, they had been appointed as ministers or they had been nominated as members of parliament.[...] And the women MPs that have been nominated even after the MMD came into power – really it is pathetic.[...] But you can see that this is just another way of undermining by choosing the calibre that they do. The notion is that they do not want women who can stand up to them or challenge them.

Knowing the constraints this MP confessed to being happy for not having been appointed to cabinet level, because she wanted to be a back-bencher “because once you are a minister then you have to agree with everything that the government says”.<sup>2</sup> One of her colleagues was not happy at being appointed as deputy minister because she “felt muzzled because I had no influence on that ministry, and in parliament, I was just supposed to support the government”.<sup>3</sup>

Some women politicians have preferred local government politics to the national level altogether, because there they felt less tied to party positions and more empowered to take immediate decisions and actions.<sup>4</sup> Many women politicians such as this BDP member were painfully aware that “as an individual I tell you what I think about gender issues, but as a BDP woman I am restricted to the resolutions of congresses. I cannot say anything apart from that”.<sup>5</sup> Within their parties women politicians have, even if restricted, possibilities of raising issues that are not yet party policy and influencing future decisions. As public figures, however, they are bound by the party line. MPs are in addition subject to disciplinary codes that compel them to vote along party lines making it difficult for them to push alternative agendas to that of their party, even if they wanted to do so.

However, if they raise gender concerns in their political party caucuses, they are often treated with “a degree of patronising indulgence”. When women MPs correctly perceive that ‘women’s issues’ are not a party priority or, worse, irritate the party leadership when ‘women go on about it’, survival instincts triumph and they back off. Suzanne Vos, an IFP MP in the South African parliament, suggested that many women MPs are not keen to be identified with the promotion of gender equality, because it “may imperil their livelihood” derived from parliament (Vos 1999:110). But if gender activism was perceived as a liability by some women parliamentarians, and male colleagues were reluctant to see such issues spill over into party caucus meetings, parliamentary debates on gender were in 1996 still carried predominantly by women only, who were

1. Interview, Gaborone, 6 July 1994.
2. Interview, Lusaka, 30 January 1994.
3. Interview, Lusaka, 24 January 1994.
4. Interview, Windhoek, December 1998.
5. Interview, Gaborone, 4 July 1994.

expected to do so by their male counterparts because if they did not it was “considered a bit off”.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, if women politicians loath situations which might be construed as tokenism, or which place them into a gender ghetto, many nonetheless acknowledge that they have special needs, and face special constraints hampering their effectiveness in political parties and parliaments. They often feel that they have more problems than men getting used to parliamentary procedures and that they have to overcome greater hurdles regarding their active participation in study groups, committees, and caucuses. A survey on the gender performance of the South African parliament, commissioned by the Speaker, found that women’s participation was on the decline because women were particularly intimidated by the “cut throat way in which proceedings were handled”.<sup>2</sup> Another independent survey revealed that half the women MPs interviewed did not plan to return to parliament after their terms of office as there was no room for their voices to be heard (Britton 1987), a feeling that found expression in the fact that the 1999 parliament had a return rate of approximately only 64 per cent among ANC women MPs.<sup>3</sup> ANC MP Jennifer Ferguson, for example, left parliament because she found it to be “like being back at school” where “the patriarchal nature is designed to kill what’s feminine”.<sup>4</sup>

Many women MPs were, moreover, struggling with the “cabalistic culture of lawmaking; the secrecy, the excruciating legalese, the monumental workload, the arcane passages of power and the lack of immediacy in results and responses” (Gevisser 1994a). Some observers have been led to believe that it has been the lack of professional skills rather than sexism that has impeded women’s self-expression in South Africa’s parliament. South African women have managed to change some of the structures that have made parliament less intimidating, and made it less of “a beer-swilling, let’s-sort-things-out-in-the-bar-kind-of-place”,<sup>5</sup> women in other countries have to continue to operate in just such atmospheres which continue to disempower them beyond the dictates of party allegiances.

#### **Sisterhood in the firing line: *Elusive reality?***

Women politicians and women’s activists alike believe that the restrictions women face in political life are to some degree maintained by women themselves. They constitute on average just over half of the voting population and the largest and most active base of political parties, giving them enough power to ensure an equal representation of women in elective decision-making bodies. The problem, all agree, is that women do not vote for each other if they can help it, preferring men instead. Male prejudices against women entering into what used to

1. Interview, Cape Town, 17 May 1995.

2. *IDASA Parliamentary Whip*, April 1996.

3. Personal information Julie Ballington, Electoral Institute of South Africa, 1 November 1999.

4. Quoted in Daryl Accone, ‘Sunday Profile’, *Sunday Independent*, 29 September 1996.

5. IFP MP Ruth Rabinowitz, quoted in ‘Synthesis of Interviews’, Commission for Gender Equality, *Redefining Politics*. South African Women and Democracy. Johannesburg, n.d. (1999), p. 52.

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be an uncontested arena is explicable and it can be fought, defied, begged for, accommodated and dealt with in manners known from everyday life, and strategies can be designed to restrict their influence, but other women remain an unknown. For the former deputy mayor of Lusaka, it was more frustrating not to get support from fellow women:

I don't mind the men, I understand them – I am ready for them. But when it is a woman, I do not know how to handle it. I find it very difficult, it is like my own sister at home is fighting me. It makes me sad.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of support women show towards each other runs deep and it is many-layered: women politicians among themselves are said not to support each other, NGO women are accused of not supporting their sisters in politics sufficiently and women politicians stand in the firing line for not supporting the cause of the women's movement, educated women seem to shun the less fortunate and vice versa. There are divisions that cut across politics where sell-outs, queen-bees and elitists compete with the very gender sensitive, the merely gender aware and the gender ignorant. In this cacophony of allegations and counter-allegations one truth shines through, namely that the divisive discourse is often a reflection of the attitudes and prejudices men have about women, and that the divisions are the result rather than the cause of discrimination. In situations where the number of positions available to women has been kept limited, competition has been fierce breeding petty jealousies and the rumours they feed on.

At the most basic level, the suggestion that women in mainstream politics, because they operate in a male dominated environment, must be sexually immoral, casts its shadow. Fellow women in the party, across parties and in the women's movement know that women are seldom appointed on merit, so they are likely to have "rubbed the right shoulders" or worse "slept their way up", particularly if they do not fall into the obvious mute party supporter category. The first question, explained a Zimbabwean politician who was appointed, was always "how did she manage?" and the immediate conclusion was inevitably that "you used your back to get into that position".<sup>2</sup>

If successful women politicians were not thought to have granted sexual favours they must have been appointed because they were submissive, not very sharp and no danger to the male establishment. While this is obviously the reason why some women are appointed, young professional and competent women politicians, are in turn not immune to accusations of having sold out to their career at the expense of their constituents – namely other young professional women with feminist aspirations.

But perhaps most damaging are the divisions between those who advocate women's increased political participation and those on whose behalf they lobby. These can run on the level of mere disagreements over strategy, or, more seriously, uncertainties and mistrust over each other's intentions. At the base of these conflicts are questions of representation, perhaps the most important and controversial aspect of the dividing lines. In South Africa, where gender activists

1. Interview, Lusaka, 25 January 1994.

2. Interviews, Zambia and Zimbabwe, 1994.

shared political power with conservative women MPs also of their own parties, divisions have spilled into the caucuses of political parties and parliament more than in other places. There and elsewhere the most obvious dividing line between women has remained party affiliation and with it ideological differences raising the question of representation in a different manner.

During a round-table discussion on “Putting Women in Power” organised by the Electoral Institute of South Africa in the run-up to the 1999 elections, Shireen Hassim, a political scientist and gender activist, pointed out that “women in parliament do not speak with one voice on so-called ‘women’s issues’ or ‘women’s concerns’”, because they, as all women, “do not form a single political identity” but are a heterogeneous group representing different classes, races, interests and views (Hassim 1999:24 and 25). This means that women do not only represent different party agendas but they also represent, even within the same party, different constituencies and pursue different goals. Hassim has suggested that different and competing voices befit a complex society and democracy, but they also create tension and conflicts.

A diversity of “voices” also exists among ANC women even though the liberation movement had submerged ideological differences in a show of unity for the sake of the struggle. For Jenny Schreiner fellow women MPs she was very close to then “seem miles apart”, perhaps because parliament had freed its members to seek their own ideas distancing themselves from “a fairly coherent ideological position”.<sup>1</sup> Divisions also occurred between women MPs who had opted to be “honorary men”, deciding to be part of the structures rather than fighting them, those who had continued to change the structures from within, and those who cut out a niche for themselves quietly doing what they did before; between “an elite type of strata” of high profiled activist “movers” and the older women who “have been working forever, and they do not get anywhere”. As in every women’s movement there were also those who have used gender as an entry point only, leaving it behind once they achieved their immediate goal.<sup>2</sup> The ANC Women’s Caucus, for example, did not command the full attention of the majority of women MPs after 1994 and brought to the surface some of the divisions along age, class and race lines. Initially the caucus was dominated by black professional women

... movers, who started in the caucus but then I think found greener pastures and moved out. And then other women moved in, including some older women and this particular young woman who is the reason why it kept going. But no white women attend the caucus except myself. We have 15 to 20 women at the most coming now, most do not attend. Most are older women now.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the older women MPs, moreover, believed that while the “movers” were gender conscious they were also so preoccupied with broader political projects “that although they will make good speeches, they are not actually dirtying their hands any more in the daily grind of getting women off their backs”.<sup>4</sup>

1. Interview, Cape Town, 18 March 1996.
2. Interview, Cape Town, 19 May 1995.
3. Interview, Cape Town, 17 May 1995.
4. *Ibid.*

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And one of the oldest and least educated former ANC MPs confessed to having felt shunned by her younger professional sisters claiming that they no longer displayed the unity of the old guard even amongst themselves.<sup>1</sup> Few of the professional women MPs, for example, were willing to help the older members, who were lost in the parliamentary day-to-day workload, and needed help “to put the right words”. A tiny minority who endeavoured to “adopt a granny” and help steer them through the institutional maze, failed on account of heavy workloads and lack of support.<sup>2</sup>

For one of the more analytical MPs in South Africa the formation of women’s caucuses was the wrong approach altogether, because “the over-prioritisation of gender as a social category by which women are particularly marginalized” was risky as, according to her analysis, simplistic equations of women with gender reinforce patriarchal gender relations (Mtinso 1999:37). In fact, a number of ANC men were not happy with the women’s caucus either, suggesting that they wanted to be part of the debate on gender issues in the party. A gender caucus might perhaps have been more appropriate and effective in “shifting the attitudes of some of our male comrades”.<sup>3</sup> It might have changed the perception, reported by Thenjiwe Mtinso, that gender was only a women’s issue, where talking about gender becomes “your personal and individual thing. If I am not there, it is not there.”<sup>4</sup> In other countries such concerns have not penetrated the debate as yet, and unity of women politicians has remained a desirable goal.

That the representation of women’s and gender interests can be a complex issue, was revealed in 1996 in South Africa when Baleka Kgositsile, then deputy speaker of parliament and an outspoken gender activist, together with other ANC women’s caucus members, openly condemned the public display of a prize winning artwork, entitled “Useful Objects” depicting an [apparently black] vagina in the form of a ceramic ashtray holding a burning cigarette. Kgositsile was upset about the outrage that many black women must have suffered on account of the object and she called for legislation to protect people from “arbitrary artistic ideals not set by the majority”.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that the artist of the offending work was a white feminist, who had tried to confront the degradation of women with her work, took Kgositsile somewhat aback. But it did not soften her attack, which she claimed represented the interests of “traditional black women” against “those of their white counterparts”.<sup>6</sup> Her call for stricter censorship laws at a time when a draft bill aimed at reversing the draconian censorship laws of the apartheid era had been prepared by parliament, made her efforts appear awkwardly retrogressive, placing her into the realm of conservatism and sycophancy. Kgositsile, of course, is anything but a traditional African woman, and she has not always chosen to repre-

1. Interview, Cape Town, 15 May 1995; Dorathee Nyembe, quoted in *Tribute*, August 1996, p. 38.

2. Interviews, Cape Town, 1995.

3. Interview, Cape Town, 18 March 1996.

4. Interview, Cape Town, 19 May 1995.

5. Quoted in *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, Editorial, ‘Poor Taste and the Deputy Speaker’, 16 to 22 August 1996.

6. Quoted in Friedman 1996.

sent that constituency. The discussion of the Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Bill that year, for example, saw her clearly minimising the concerns of traditional black women.

The passing of the bill further illustrated the problems of representation. In 1995, when the bill was still to be adopted by cabinet, the ANC had reminded its members that a vote of conscience where ANC members would not be subject to the dictates of the party whip and could vote as individuals would not be tolerated. Kgotsitsile explained that “a vote of conscience is unacceptable because ANC MPs were elected to Parliament through proportional representation on a party list, and thus must take a party line”.<sup>1</sup> This affected a large number of ANC MPs including many women, whose personal views were ruled by traditions and religions opposed to abortion on demand. When the bill came to the vote one ANC MP, Jennifer Ferguson, a white artist, nonetheless abstained from the vote<sup>2</sup> because she had been “unable to vote without conscience” and to “reduce the complexity of the issue into a mere choice of two buttons”.<sup>3</sup> Women’s rights activist Pregs Govender subsequently challenged her as a fellow woman ANC MP in an open letter to *The Cape Times*: “What is your responsibility as an MP voted into a position of power and privilege in relation to the rights of women who put you there?” And she quoted the case of another ANC MP, Sister Ncube, a nun, who voted for the bill and against the belief of her church and had thus had shown “faith, conviction and compassion that go beyond herself”.<sup>4</sup> Other women within the ANC also voted with a public rather than a private conscience.<sup>5</sup> Women members of opposition parties, such as the NP for example, might have had similar clashes of conscience representing their party’s anti-abortion stance. Women in the IFP too were reported to be pro-choice but “they were too frightened to speak up about their views in front of the men” who held a different view.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, perhaps, the ANC’s vote might thus have disempowered a number of ANC MPs but indirectly empowered opposition MPs.

Inter-party unity has not come as easy for South African women parliamentarians as it had for the members of the Women’s National Coalition. Initially, after the new parliament convened, issues of common interest could still be found: demands focused on making parliament liveable for women, such as the provision of child-care facilities,<sup>7</sup> and toilets and gyms for women rather than just men, offered easy opportunities to continue co-operation in the spirit of the WNC. Thereafter, allegiance to the party tended to outweigh sisterhood. The Women’s Parliamentary Group (WPG), an inter-party women’s caucus initiated

1. *Mail and Guardian*, 4–10 August, 1995.

2. This excluded 11 ANC members who, with permission of the whip, opted to stay away during the vote, *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg), 15–21 November, 1996.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Mail and Guardian*, 15–21 November, 1996.

5. *Mail and Guardian*, 4–10 August, 1996.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Even though the crèche is frequently mentioned as one of the successes of inter-party cooperation, the inter-party unity on the issue might not have as smooth as suggested, with opposition to the crèche being raised by Democratic Party members, and the location of the crèche vetoed by IFP members (Interview, Cape Town, 18 March 1996).

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by Ginwala, was not successful in the 1990s. The group did not meet with the support of minority parties, was not funded by parliament, and was deemed to be an add-on task to be fitted into lunch hours and weekends.<sup>1</sup> The NP leadership had problems with the group on principle fearing like other minority parties that “the caucus would be high-jacked as an ANC front, and we would just be used as pawns or decorations, so that they can say they are impartial”.<sup>2</sup> ANC MPs, on the other hand, did not believe in the caucus, fearing that it would provide a platform for conservative women to speak on behalf of all women:

Do we want to give people a chance to take the platform on behalf of all women when their politics and the way they behave themselves, and the way the party behave themselves, does not represent working class interests, rural interests, black interests at all?<sup>3</sup>

On other occasions ANC women had been vexed by the NP gender spokesperson’s criticism of the add-on attitude to gender in a central ANC policy document, even though her criticism matched their own, though not publicly voiced assessment of the same document.<sup>4</sup> ANC women were thus just as subject as their sisters to putting party alliance over sisterhood.

Vos, the IFP MP with feminist ambitions already mentioned, has pointed out that the majority of women MPs in South Africa’s 1994 parliament were no feminists. In her view only a “hard core of women pushed the obvious agenda. Only few kept the faith.” She particularly criticised fellow women MPs for having failed to vote for other women MPs “in leadership contests for party whips, for example. The results were there on blackboards for all to see: they voted for men.” (Vos 1999:106 and 107). Some of her feminist ANC sisters would counter her argument, suggesting that the quality of a candidate trumps gender alone, and that it is at times tactical for women not to “say things on gender”.<sup>5</sup>

Women MPs in neighbouring countries also established inter-party parliamentary women’s caucuses through the 1990s. There has, perhaps, been more unity amongst them, as the numbers of members were small and their political parties had fewer policies regarding issues of immediate interest to a gender forum, thus allowing, perhaps, for more fruitful inter-party co-operation. In Namibia, for example, the parliamentary women’s caucus lobbied successfully with NGOs on the Marriage Equality Act, which met opposition from male MPs across the political spectrum. Yet, the women could not move on the issue of the stalled abortion reform law, since in that instance party positions and personal beliefs could not be reconciled.<sup>6</sup> More recently, Zimbabwean women MPs, halved in numbers after the June 2000 elections, have vowed to work together across party lines on issues of common interest, such as the land reform and AIDS policies.<sup>7</sup>

1. Interview, Cape Town, 20 March 1996.
2. Interview, Cape Town, 19 March 1996.
3. Interview, Cape Town, 18 March 1993.
4. Interview, Cape Town, 20 March 1996.
5. Interviews, Cape Town, 19 May 1995 and 18 March 1996.
6. Interview, Windhoek, December 1998.
7. Reported by Southern African Research and Documentation Centre, ‘Female MPs pledge to work together’, 22 August 2000, [www.allafrica.com](http://www.allafrica.com).

Zambia has always been a country where women politicians were divided and the existence of a Women Parliamentary Forum and a Women's Manifesto, which committed those who adopted it to unequivocal support to women's candidates did not stop these divisions. The NWLG was not successful in preventing women standing against each other in the 2001 elections, with certain wards featuring women from opposed parties or even from the same party (Bull 2001: 100). The prominent former MMD minister Edith Nawakwi, who had moved to an opposition party as its vice-president, and had exchanged her former MMD constituency in the rural North East of Zambia with Munali constituency in Lusaka closer to home, stood against one of her female party colleagues, Cindy Mutale, who had decided to stand as an independent against her.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, women voters in Munali had decided to back Nawakwi's opponent. One of the women's spokespersons, Masela Sekeseke-Chinyama, a deputy national chairperson for youth affairs of yet another opposition party, announced that although the women of Munali had resolved "to support fellow women candidates regardless of party affiliation at the launch of the women's manifesto" they had decided not to support Nawakwi on account of her alleged gender insensitivity. [then continue par as in original with changes as indicated.

During her 10 years as minister in the Chiluba government, she allegedly did not speak out against "women injustices": "All she can be remembered for is her mini-skirts which kept male MPs awake." Sekeseke-Chinyama also alleged that Nawakwi was not a nice woman because she "grabbed somebody's husband", and that her opposition to Chiluba's third term in office, which had caused her to defect from MMD, was a "hidden political agenda" because "she wanted a top political office".<sup>2</sup>

More important in the region, however, have been the divisions which historically developed between women politicians of the old guard represented by women's wings and the new guard of women politicians aspiring to a career in the mainstream. The leaderships of women's leagues have been shown to be reluctant to elevate their own members into the mainstream, and they have tended to disapprove of women politicians who never joined their ranks as active members. Motsei Madisa, BNF member and a member of *Emang Basadi* in Botswana, found that in pushing gender equality goals

... you have more opposition from the women's wing itself than from the main party. Because when we, at *Emang*, were trying to invite people to come to what we called the candidates' workshop, in the end there was more opposition from the women's wing than from the major party. How we ended up having a lot of people attending the forum, was that a male politician took a decision that as many women as possible must attend. From the women's wing there was the problem of women trying to prevent other women from attending.<sup>3</sup>

Women politicians in the main wing have thus not been able – as do their male colleagues – to rely on the grassroots mobilisation skills of women's wings. There have been exceptions, however. The deputy mayor of Lusaka, for exam-

1. 'FDD to step up Munali campaign', *Times of Zambia*, 5 August 2001.

2. 'Embattled Nawakwi Still under Siege'. *Times of Zambia*, 4 December 2001.

3. Interview, Gaborone, 8 July 1994

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ple, discovered that unlike fellow educated women, who she claimed were jealous of her success, uneducated women in the women's wing of her party "know they are different, in terms of material wealth and they are happy to associate with me".<sup>1</sup> In general, however, women politicians have remained dependent on the support of men. Inonge Lewanika in Zambia experienced that

No woman will win any elections at present, unless she enlists the support of men as well, and does not solely address herself to the women voters...Men have been amongst my most faithful supporters in word and deed. (Mbikusita-Lewanika 1998:156)

In addition, and contributing to the divisions, men have been happy to re-enforce petty jealousies and conflicts among women by playing them off against each other, whenever opportunities arise. Thus strong women candidates in primaries, who appeared undesirable to the party leadership were pitted against party picked women, who almost automatically would have had the support of the women's wing. Outspoken women politicians have been appointed as the deputies of less vocal sisters, creating situations where the ensuing tensions could readily be interpreted as gender-specific "bitching". For the former deputy mayor of Lusaka the fact that she did not get the support of the women she worked with, made her change her attitude towards them, as seeing them as her enemies:

If I work among women who do not want me, what will I do for women? I will have to work against them. In fact men started to use these women against me. The same old divide and rule [tactic]. They just used them to talk a lot of nonsense against me, and not to support me. [...] If I had not fought my way out, they would have destroyed me.<sup>2</sup>

A related complaint has been that once women made it into positions they forget about their colleagues and fail to appoint them – and that those who succeed are pulled down by their sisters. Moreover, in situations where only very few women are admitted and promoted, fierce competition is bound to feed into jealousies and rumour-mongering. Zambian president Chiluba obviously knew why he was not in favour of gender quotas, because, according to his experiences, it would destroy competition "between women and women" and the spirit of "grab-[bing] what you can from the basket".<sup>3</sup>

But unlike in South Africa, where tensions based on the different perceptions of activists, feminists and career politicians are part of the parliamentary and inner party discourse, these divisions have polarised women politicians within and activists outside formal politics. This has also remained the main dividing line in an era where women's activists have lobbied women politicians. Part of the problem has been that women's activists and lobby groups have chosen to support women candidates as women, irrespective of party affiliation and level of preparedness to pursue gender advocacy. While this is a perfectly legitimate approach, support has gone to women of political parties that have no gender policy, or policies that do not support gender equality goals, and might even seek to reverse gains already won. It has also included a range of women whose

1. Interview, Lusaka, 25 January 1994.

2. Interview, Lusaka, 25 January 1994.

3. Quoted in 'Chiluba challenges Women', *Times of Zambia*, 2 March 2000; Hampande 2000.

reasons for wishing to enter politics have been as diverse as their attitudes towards gender equality.

It has therefore not been surprising that only a small number of women politicians who in one way or another gained from lobby activities, have in their political careers gone out of their way to embrace gender concerns. More surprising, perhaps, was the disappointment of the women's movement, when they realised that quantity in numbers does not guarantee that gender is addressed any better than before. If feminist MPs in South Africa were concerned about sisters not having kept the faith, the women MPs in neighbouring countries probably never had the "right" faith to lose. For women activists who had hoped to find spokespersons for their specific interests, women MPs seemed to be sell-outs, keeping to party policy statements and refusing to stick their heads out for the feminist cause. The feminist project of gaining access to power via women politicians seemed to have failed.

Women politicians, on the other hand, have been very disappointed with the lack of support the lobbies have afforded them. Many maintain that the support had been restricted to election campaigns, and even then did it not move much beyond vague words of encouragement to those who asked for it. Many had expected gender activists, for example, to come to their rescue, when they were stuck for campaign funds and supporters, when they fought and lost the nominations in the political parties, and also after they entered parliament. The NWLG in Zambia, for example, admitted that "besides the training that women received they also needed material and moral support in order for them to campaign effectively". They quoted the December 1998 local government elections, when women's organisations able to help candidates had been closed for Christmas, and T-shirts, bicycles and maize meal, financed by OXFAM, did not reach all women candidates in time (National Women's Lobby Group 1998:13 and 16). In the run-up to the 2001 Zambian general elections the support of the NGOCC and the NWLG as one of its members also seemed to have been a bone of contention for some political aspirants, who alleged that NGOs received donor funds for supporting female candidates but would not hand the money out and used it for themselves and their media campaigns only.<sup>1</sup>

Many politicians in Zambia and Botswana thus felt that Lobby Group members had failed to give them tangible support beyond lip-service. Politicians had expected Lobby members to offer more hands-on support within their political parties, giving training sessions and raising the questions about women's representation to help change the climate against women: "Questions have to be asked. They have to question from the outside. I cannot ask my own party people!"<sup>2</sup> Others have demanded that Lobby members actually become members of political parties and electoral colleges to help women candidates from within to win or to run campaigns for them or other women candidates. They argue that the problem with impartiality is that the women activists actually cannot get

1. 'Women complain about non-supportive NGOs', *Times of Zambia*, 24 November – 3 December 2001.

2. Interview, Gaborone, 5 July 1994.

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involved, and thus cannot, in fact, help, because what is needed is help within the political parties, “not somewhere out there!”<sup>1</sup>

In a scathing attack, which reflects the complaints of many women politicians about would-be lobbyists, Inonge Lewanika has charged that after her defeat as chairperson of the National Party in 1994 many women activists expressed regret and upset. Asked, however, why they had not been at the convention where the fatal election took place:

Some said that are they non-partisan because of the kinds of jobs they did. Others would not be bothered about party politics. They only wished to vote in general elections. I asked them who they thought would vote for me at party conventions, if they sat in their air-conditioned offices and homes, away from where the action was. [...] I realised that many women waited on the sidelines, eager to jump in and lift the trophy if the game was won, but quick to turn their backs and disappear in the crowd if the game got rough or the home team lost. (Mbikusita-Lewanika 1998:158)

Her disappointment with the women’s movement had not abated seven years later when she contested the 2001 elections as one of the presidential candidates. She stated that on that occasion the only help she received from the NWLG “was to have her own campaign materials photocopied”. She complained that the “women’s movement raised a lot of hope but in the end this was very limited”. And Gwedoline Konie, a fellow woman presidential candidate claimed to have got no support, financial or otherwise, beyond “one photo poster and 30 copies of the women’s manifesto” (Bull 2001:117).

Impartiality also irritated women politicians in other ways, in that it suggested that women’s interests were more important than party loyalties, an assumption that none of the women politicians could agree with, not even very feminist oriented ones. None of them believed that the message of the women’s lobbies that women should vote for women because they are women rather than for a particular political party made sense to them or to voters. Many believed it was self-defeating to vote for a woman of an opposition party rather than a man of their own party. Party allegiances are paramount for politicians, and the fact that women’s lobbyists had other ideas suggested political ignorance. One of them questioned:

I actually wonder how many of them have stood in the line and voted? Some of them have never actually gone to the poll.<sup>2</sup>

For many women politicians the non-partisan attribute of women activists translated into apolitical behaviour, a misjudgement that betrayed a deeper feeling of suspected inadequacy.

Despite these signs of apparent political immaturity, women politicians in Zambia and Botswana identified political ambitions as the driving motivation of lobbyists. Allegations that lobby members used their activities as a springboard for their own political careers proved most damaging in the relationship between activists and politicians. In Zambia many women politicians shared the widely held opinion that NWLG members sought to be appointed to positions

1. Interviews, Gaborone, 4 and 6 July 1994.

2. Interview, Gaborone, 5 July 1994.

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themselves. Even Inonge Lewanika, one of the NWLG's most fervent supporters among politicians, complained about these selfish tendencies:

My first disappointment with women in Zambian politics happened when we were lobbying for the inclusion of women in government. It transpired that some women were soliciting for personal appointments at the expense of a united women's stand. (Mbikusita-Lewanika 1998:158)

It may well have been so. The lists of women eligible for office presented to the president after the 1991 elections included women from within the women's movement, but that would hardly have been surprising since many professional women were active members. Some of the founding members of the NWLG itself, had, after all, ended up as MPs in parliament, and even in cabinet.

In Botswana similar concerns were perhaps more openly expressed. Particularly contentious here was *Emang Basadi's* call for a gender quota for reserved parliamentary seats. For one BDP woman politician the fact that *Emang* did not really seem to be particularly bothered about women politicians who lost primaries (as she had done) or the reasons why they had lost, but were mainly concerned with a quota for members of parliament appointed by the president, indicated that they were only interested in getting themselves into parliament:

My impression is that they want the president to think "Ah, that woman activist! Oh, that lady there at the university, that professor, I think she should join us." The women who have been in the game, who have been in the deep end of politics, we do not believe that you can tickle somebody from the lecture room into politics. You must be there in the frying pan of politics... there are women in all parties who have identified themselves [for specially elected seats]. If they are elected that is not tokenism.

Women's lobby groups have maintained that being non-partisan is the only way of operating if they wish to get the women from all parties together. A member of *Emang* rather impatiently dismissed the plea for *Emang* members to help women politicians within political parties demanding, instead, that politicians must change the structures themselves: "What are they doing in their parties to get more women representation? What about them? They do have women's wings, what are the women's wings doing. They should be aggressive." And going into political parties to lobby, was considered just another form of party recruitment which "some of us have resisted".<sup>1</sup>

*Emang* members believed that the specially elected seats in parliament should be reserved for "those women who are capable of filling them, but who are not able to because there is no level playing field":

For us it is very important that we get people in during this time, and for that experience we need a certain calibre of people. If this were a concerted effort of ourselves and other organisations concerned I think we could identify people. It really would have served us well to have one or two people there, even if they are not really active, but have the ability to grasp what is going on, to report back. [...] Then we could come up with strategies, for the next coming elections. [...] Even if these people fall out of parliament after five years at least they would fall back into the movement and could share their experiences.<sup>2</sup>

1. Interview, Gaborone, 7 July 1994.

2. Interview, Gaborone, 5 July 1994.

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It is perhaps not astonishing that politicians and activists clashed on the importance of those seats, which were to be part of a political fact-finding mission for the women's movement, but in the eyes of the politicians were a cheap short-cut to power without dirtying your hands with politics, rather an apolitical way to be a politician. And that again was interpreted as a sign of the elitism of women activists, which women politicians see manifested in a number of ways, of which the refusal of women activists to engage in party politics – “to sing?” – is just one. Elitism also manifests itself in the suggestion of lobbyists that party women must come to them with their problems (Dube 1994). Politicians, such as Lydia Ketlogetswe of the BDP, by contrast, believed that “as a pressure group they should be the ones getting to women to encourage and even empower them to fight”<sup>1</sup> because, added a colleague from an opposition party, “how do you expect them to come and tell you their problems. Because the minute they talk, tomorrow they will be disciplined by the party”.<sup>2</sup>

Elitism was also detected in women activists' preference for “making money with consultancies in the NGOs” so that the “issues they are concerned about are very selfish”.<sup>3</sup> For some women politicians all this meant that activists really did not have a strong connection to rural people, which they just appeared to have on occasional weekends, like “*Emang* comes to Mochudi, women's right and what not, fine. When they leave they are forgotten”.<sup>4</sup> Politicians claim to have a deeper understanding of the problems of rural people, something *Emang* members would perhaps question, since both politicians and activists are after all urban based. A woman minister in Zambia complained in the same vein that women activists “are all educated and can read, but they would not go into my constituency” to see what needs to be done and get development activities going.<sup>5</sup>

In both Zambia and Botswana women politicians stressed again and again, that women activists simply do not take rural women's concerns into account, and that they overestimate rural women's interests in feminist inspired changes to the law. In Botswana the debate around the Citizenship Act was quoted as an example that law reforms were not of immediate interest to rural women who put their weight behind traditions, even if they are discriminatory. More than just a training workshop by middle class urban women was needed to change rural attitudes. Instead women activists “are just dismissed” and villagers “would not listen to them because they suspect that they are different, and that gender issues overturn parties”.<sup>6</sup>

Edith Nawakwi, as newly appointed Minister of Energy, discovered in Zambia after 1991, that the problems of her constituency and the challenges of her appointment were much broader than the claims of the women's movement.

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1. Quoted in Dube 1994.
  2. Interview, Gaborone, 5 July 1994.
  3. Interview, Gaborone, 5 July 1994.
  4. Interview, Gaborone, 4 July 1994.
  5. Interview, Lusaka, 4 February 1994.
  6. Interviews, Gaborone, July 1994.

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Defensive about being called gender-insensitive by former colleagues in the women's movement she charged:

Which women am I supposed to have forgotten? [...] My responsibility is to improve the standard of women, water and sanitation. If women can have access to clean water, to protect their children from diarrhoea, if I can supply them with electricity to ease their workload with firewood, I have done my part. But [for the women's movement] if you are found at the women's lobby meetings discussing inheritance laws – than you are gender sensitive. I am more gender sensitive when I am at the YWCA and discuss domestic violence.<sup>1</sup>

Nawakwi, of course, touched a raw nerve of the women's movement, suggesting that their members' concerns were one-sided, and, perhaps, elitist, in that they were removed from the everyday life of rural women who had to deal with practical gender needs before they could be receptive to more strategic goals (Sifuniso 1998:212).

Interestingly, in South Africa, women activists who moved “from grassroots to ruminating in parliament”<sup>2</sup> found that as politicians they lost contact with the grassroots as parliament has alienated them from the concerns of the women's movement. At the most basic level women MPs felt that being in parliament frustrated their activist aspirations. For Dorothy Nyembe, one of the most activist grassroots oriented MPs in the first government and also one of the oldest and least educated, admitted missing her people:

I feel as if I left them behind. I am worrying about them all the time... instead of helping them, I am here doing nothing – just sitting and reading. It makes me anxious, because when I go home they will ask: ‘What have you done to help us?’ and what will I be able to say?<sup>3</sup>

Other MPs with strong grassroots connections and perhaps not so much education felt similarly inadequate in parliament. Lydia Kompe, the former leader of the radical Rural Women's Movement (RWM), felt initially “completely disempowered. I cannot see myself making any input never mind impact here.”<sup>4</sup> Like Nyembe, she was very disappointed by the fact that her hope to be able to exercise influence in the interest of the rural people had been dashed, since she had “no idea that I was going to spend most of my time bogged down with bills that I barely understand”. She, too, was worried by the dissatisfaction and disappointment in her constituency, that changes were not brought about fast enough.

Like their constituents former activist women MPs felt frustrated by the lack of spontaneity in parliament, where land is “not just land anymore, it's words”, and where “you can't just stand up and shout ‘point of order’. You have to write your question down and it will be dealt with in three weeks, when you are cool again.” Ultimately they found themselves “in this hoek (corner) where I have to mediate between my constituency and the realities of government”.<sup>5</sup> Nyembe's

1. Interview, Lusaka, 4 February 1994.
2. Title of an article by Gevisser 1994.
3. Quoted in Gevisser 1994.
4. Quoted in Mtinso 1999:41.
5. Statements quoted in Gevisser 1994.

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and Kompe's more educated activist sisters felt equally alienated and under threat of transforming into persons they did not want to be:

I get transformed into a politician and there is something that I am going to lose in that process. We who are activists and who have said that parliament is another terrain of struggle get swallowed up in parliament as an institution.<sup>1</sup>

Part of the problem was that she and others no longer got regular feedback from people outside parliament, and the MPs tended to form a closed group whose members were even in their spare time still discussing "the problems around this building and how it functions and everything around it", rather than the problems of the people.<sup>2</sup> For Jenny Schreiner this meant that MPs were "empowering each other instead of women at the grassroots. It's elitist." Schreiner and her colleagues, particularly fellow members of the South African Communist Party (SACP), have very consciously avoided being sucked into the temptations of elitism that parliament represented.<sup>3</sup> One ANC MP assessed very critically the elitism that might be involved:

People are getting enormous salaries here, something like five times what they were getting outside. They have really fallen with their bums in the butter and they just cannot bring themselves to criticise it. Like winning the pools for a lot of them. There is not much concern expressed for those people that have been left behind. [...] Amongst women MPs you get much more preoccupation with 'Why are there not more women in the Senate?' 'Why are there not more women cabinet ministers?' 'Why are there not more women here and there and everywhere and much less interest when you start talking about grassroots women and going out there...'<sup>4</sup>

For another ANC MP it is the liberal approach to women's concerns as a question of creating opportunity only rather than a desire to transform society that needs to be avoided and rectified. Some MPs have tried very consciously not to get sucked into these temptations like this one who declared that:

Consciously I will not change my lifestyle. So although I have to go and buy some clothing other than jeans and t-shirts, even there I take a conscious decision to dress in a way that I still feel is me, communist that I am.<sup>5</sup>

There is an underlying and at times explicit suggestion that the temptations of getting sucked into elitist behaviour are perhaps stronger for those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, but this is not necessarily always the case. A woman senator who was catapulted from life as a primary school teacher in a squatter camp in a remote rural town to Cape Town, felt profoundly uncomfortable with even having to hire a person to clean her house, because she had always "cleaned her shack herself". She explained:

[When I go back home] I make a point of going back to the school where I used to teach. And people are saying: 'Oh, you have not changed. Why do you not have a Porsche car?' And I say: 'I do not need Porsche cars. You are my Porsche car – you, the community!'<sup>6</sup>

1. Interview, Cape Town, 19 May 1995.
2. Interview, Cape Town, 19 May 1995.
3. Quoted in *Mail and Guardian*, 5 to 11 May 1995.
4. Interview, Cape Town, 17 May 1995.
5. Interview, Cape Town, 18 March 1996.
6. Interview, Cape Town, 21 March 1996.

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A gender activist and union organiser in Durban suggested that the women activists in parliament felt abandoned by the women's movement outside and pointed to the obligations of their constituency:

Look we have put them there, so we have to decide how we are going to work with them, we cannot blame them now for being on the gravy train when we put them there.<sup>1</sup>

But the fact remains that this did to a large degree not happen. In 1995 during the preparations for the Beijing conference the then Deputy Minister of Welfare, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi who also headed the Beijing delegation bemoaned the fact that instead of a vibrant women's movement, there is only a "major vacuum" in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> Particularly damaging, perhaps, has been the fact that the Women's National Coalition "has not turned out to be the catalyst for the long-hoped-for women's movement" able to produce "the collective will to take on the implementation of the [women's] charter" (Meintjes 1998:83).

The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) has been mandated to create a partnership with NGOs and "thus to bring to the centre the voices and experiences of the marginalized, to become part of, and to inform, the nation-building and transformation agenda of South African society" (Commission for Gender Equality 1998). The commission was thus intended to represent a new connection between the grassroots and government, remaining with the people while being part of the leading force. Three years into its existence, some gender activists complained that the commission was not doing enough and some members of the commission complained that gender activists were not sufficiently willing to carry its agenda, but instead delegated both the work and the blame to the commission.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the point of connection between the CGE and parliament, the Office for the Status of Women (OSW), has been reported to have been involved in a "territorial struggle for power" hampering its ability to work with others.<sup>4</sup>

Both women activists inside and outside parliament have acknowledged the gaps that exist between parliamentary discourse and women's organisations and between women parliamentarians and the majority of ordinary women who remain unorganised and oppressed by patriarchal structures, and they have been well aware that these gaps must be closed. They are also aware that this is, perhaps, the most urgent challenge facing the "women's movement is its relationship with the democratic government and women's relationship with politics".<sup>5</sup> But this is also a challenge that faces the women MPs, to work out ways of establishing, and keeping themselves open to, the concerns of women outside. That this is difficult has been proved by the dissatisfaction some women activists felt within the process of changing from activist to politician. Lydia Kompe might still have felt "like a rural woman" when she sat in parliament, and might have addressed the government as "they" as if she was still outside it, but her

1. Interview, Durban, 23 March 1995.
2. Quoted in Speed 1995:10.
3. Personal information, Durban, April to July 2000.
4. IDASA, *epoliticsSA*, 18, 7 July 2000.
5. Interview with Frene Ginwala, Cape Town, 22 May 1995.

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former sisters-in-arms might well have had different ideas about her, particularly when it transpired that the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act failed to address the legal future of polygamy and *lobola*, which have long been on the customs-to-be-scraped-list of the Rural Women's Movement.<sup>1</sup>

The limitations imposed on politicians for a myriad of reasons, the patriarchal nature of political institutions and the rigours of being party rather than women's representatives being chief amongst them, necessitate a strong and broad women's movement able and willing to work with parliamentarians and to act as their power base. One cannot be effective without the other. But this also means that women politicians must consciously avoid being absorbed into patriarchal agendas and be willing to commit themselves to gender transformations. That this is a difficult process has perhaps been best exemplified in South Africa, where the conclusion of gender activists inside and outside parliament after five years has been that access of women to parliament alone is not sufficient to drive gender transformation. For Thenjiwe Mtinso "the quality of the numbers, not just quality of women numbers, quality broadly with women and men" has been even more important.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this is relevant not only for politicians but also for civil society. This would suggest that women cannot rely on government alone to create the conditions that will improve their lives, nor can they rely on civil society alone to do so.

1. Quoted in Gevisser 1994.  
2. Interview, Cape Town, 19 May 1995.

## Conclusion

Historians and political scientists had claimed through the 1980s that African women had chosen to disengage from the state and to withdraw from formal politics. They had suggested that “with the prevailing public-private distinction, women’s issues are not conceptualised as political, thus rendering politics of little use to them”,<sup>1</sup> and that “the victimisation of women by the state had fuelled a conscious assertion of independence”.<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Staudt had very pessimistically asked if the state could “ever accommodate women’s comprehensive gender concerns” and she doubted that it could be sufficiently transformed to “be part of the solution to women” (Staudt 1987:208). In 1991 Chris Allen had charged that such interpretations were loaded with conservatism since they denied the possibility of democratic struggles, particularly by women, which would represent neither withdrawal nor incorporation but a remaking of politics (Staudt 1987:208).

Allen was proved right with his suggestion that in the 1970s and 1980s African women were not so much withdrawing from politics but rather being excluded from political decision-making and from using politics as a forum to pursue their own struggles, feminist or not. In fact, unlike other subordinate groups women were not excluded from politics *per se*, since they gained the franchise together with men. Uneducated urban women with middle-class ambitions and rural women, for example, had formed the majority of party members and the backbone of political parties in both democratic and one party post colonial states.

The wave of democratisation in the 1990s and the promise of a re-making of politics that it carried with it inspired different women with different expectations and ambitions to engage in political activities and to seek political office. That it encouraged women who had previously appeared to have consciously withdrawn from formal politics, such as young professionals, suggests that they were not opposed to politics or the state as such but to specific political systems that excluded them and their concerns.

In all the countries surveyed here women had forced their way into the politics of anti-colonial movements against male resistance, and they had done so with the expectation of gaining a better society, and bettering their own position within it. That women meant to come out into the public arena was evident by the insistence they placed on public positions, be it as party mobilisers in Zambia and Botswana or as combatants in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. There and elsewhere in the region women entered the public arena

1. Kathleen Staudt quoted in Allen 1991:213.

2. Naomi Chazan quoted in *ibid.*

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in order to protect the private domain and their roles as mothers and wives. Yet the militancy with which they did so, suggested that they had ambitions beyond being mothers and wives only.

But not only were they pushed back into domesticity after independence after their short stint in the trenches, many young women, the ex-combatants in Namibia and Zimbabwe amongst them, did not feel welcomed by the members of the women's wings of ruling parties (once the liberation movements), who decried them as prostitutes and marriage-wreckers. Former combatants joined progressive and professional women, many of whom had not been part of the independence struggles at all, deriding members of women's wings as pathetic, ineffectual, and co-opted and declared that they would not want to sing their way up the party ladder, even if they were invited to do so. But ultimately their hostility was a reaction to the conservatism these women's league members had embraced in order to survive in the political world of men. Women who did not approximate to this conservative image had no choice but to disengage, and given that it was very difficult to enter mainstream politics without the support of the women's wing, they lacked viable entry points into formal politics.

The withdrawal of young professional women and ex-combatants was thus as much an act of defiance as it was a statement of political discontent, and their activities in civil society would attest to this. Critical of the apolitical nature of women's clubs which were supported by women's leagues, professional women engaged in quasi political activities, seeking legal reforms, and combating antiquated customary practices and ideas, which constricted their lives, such as *lobola*, polygamy, initiation ceremonies, and general attitudes that relegated women to the kitchen and made them the subordinates of husbands. The largely apolitical nature of WID concerns, which never quite managed to raise the spectre of gender inequality, thus gave way to more critical approaches that questioned social inequalities in the family as well as patriarchal state structures and policies. In their wake African women were increasingly able and willing to fuse the public and the private, and undertake gender politics from within the confines of patriarchal boundaries.

The claim that in African states in particular public-private distinctions that relegated women's concerns into an arena defined as non-political and thus rendered politics of no use to women, therefore needs to be qualified. A number of authors have claimed that the exclusion of women from politics was premised on an artificial division of society into public and private spheres, started during the colonial period and perpetuated by independent states. Public/private distinctions had not, these authors have suggested, existed in pre-colonial societies. In these societies, where production and reproduction were closely linked and women fulfilled dual roles, "economic and political relationships were 'corporate', not individual". In Gwendolyn Mikell's interpretation this "ideological model acknowledges that individuals are part of many interdependent human relations" with a goal to "maintain the harmony and well-being of the group rather than that of individuals" (Mikell 1997a:11). This meant that while African societies were gender stratified "gender issues were political issues, reflected in authority structures, and both relevant and central to society" (Staudt

1987:208). This background and the fact that many African women were economically marginalised first by colonialism and later by independent states have meant that they were “concerned with bread, butter, culture and power issues” (Mikell 1997a:4) and that they have lent their energies to movements closely associated with agendas for social and political change (Molyneux 1998:219). For many African women personal liberation has thus been more tied up within broader political movements than has been the case in the North, and it has prevented a slide of gender concerns into the obscurity of being merely social issues. In many ways the debate between Western and African sisters during the 1980s at UN conferences and on other occasions was based on this fundamental misunderstanding, as in Africa the merging of private and public spheres was a given whereas in the West they were separated to such a degree that gender struggles tended to exclude the broader political context.

The different heritage of African and Western women’s experiences formed the backdrop of African women’s political interest in creating spaces for engaging with the state. Unlike in Western countries, where “the touch of the state was interpreted as universally polluting” African states proved to be weak, their power bases dispersed in a network of fluid relations. Unable and unwilling to provide welfare services, alter prevailing family relations, or to enforce laws, states remained removed from many women, who largely stayed dependent upon their own resources. But at the same time civil society, too, was like the state “imbued with masculinist discourses” even if the forms and mechanisms of coercion differed. Thus both the state and civil society have presented women with boundaries. Therefore they have not been able to afford to “look for one to oppose the other” (Rai 1996:33).

If African women have not always experienced the state as “polluting”, their marginality from the state still affected them – it has loomed large when they have transgressed boundaries, but it has also exercised influence on women’s lives by default, such as in the case of economic and welfare policies. Women have thus been better off seeking “protection by the very power whose violation one fears” in order to gain if not power at least a certain degree of control. In fact, the imperatives of gaining control grew through the 1980s when structural adjustment policies pushed the economic and social burdens increasingly onto women while state intervention in social sectors declined. Thus while the state further removed itself from the social and economic lives of women (and men) it managed to indirectly have an effect on the supposedly “private” sphere of family survival.

Economic crisis and political failures have, together with democratisation, Mikell has suggested, opened “crisis-initiated political spaces as dialogue opportunities” which have increasingly “removed some of women’s fears and much of their reluctance to seek public office” and encouraged them to take the “political opportunities to alter their socio-political positions” (Mikell 1995:409). Thus:

African women are now asserting that it is the vulnerability of the state that renders it incapable of addressing their needs, and that their major responsibility must be to participate in local, public and political processes that bring women and other groups of

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ordinary citizens into dialogue with government – one that challenges it to more assertive and positive actions. Out of this dialogue, they hope, will come new approaches to strengthening government's ability to respond to the needs of entire populations, as well as a new frankness among women about their own needs for growth and development. (Mikell 1997a:33)

Ironically, perhaps, the willingness of many educated, professional women to contest their interests for gender equality in formal politics have marginalised the interests of rural and urban poor women, broadly represented in the women's wings of political parties. As educated women have been moving into mainstream politics, women's wings have become even more removed from decision making than they were in the past, and many have stagnated to a point of having become obsolete. Even the ANC Women's League, which in the early 1990's had emerged as a driving force for pushing gender equality goals, for example, has since 1994 suffered from disorganisation and a lack of a programme of action and ceased to be the prominent conduit for women's voices (Kadali 1997). Many of the women who were once active executive members of the League moved into parliament or left for other reasons and are no longer in contact with League affairs. Earlier the Women's League of ZANU(PF) came to be overshadowed by the profiles of women MPs who have never been active members and who claimed no stake in the organisation. As professional women continue to make headlines in the centre of political debate, either as politicians or in an increasingly political NGO sector, their less fortunate sisters in women's wings have more than ever turned into the behind-the-scenes helpers of male politicians and their interests.

This has meant that rural and other less articulate women – by far the majority in all the countries surveyed here – have lost out on whatever small influence and representation they had previously enjoyed. Since their more educated sisters have not been keen to represent the interests of women's leagues in decision making, knowing better than to ask their members for electoral support and relying instead on supporters in the political mainstream, often men, as well as NGOs lobbying for women's equal representation in politics, there have been no immediate points of contact which could have helped push the agendas and politics of women's leagues into a new era.

In addition, women in the NGO sector, even when they have embraced formal politics as a legitimate strategy for pursuing gender equality goals, have continued to stay clear of involvement with women's leagues, too. The reasons for this are obvious: in Namibia, for example, the women's wing of the ruling SWAPO party had through the 1990s persistently re-affirmed its intention to incorporate or dominate independent NGOs and their projects. But despite the danger of cooptation in all countries surveyed here autonomous women's movements have attempted with varying degrees of success to present unified fronts, and to represent broad based women's coalitions. Officially part of civil society, women's wings have remained on the margins of these projects or they have remained outside, curiously caught between the government – NGO set-up in a quasi one-party state time warp. With little influence within their own political parties and hostility in the NGO sector, women's leagues offer less and less promise to their broad membership beyond positions in their own hierarchies.

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In places where women's leagues have endeavoured to demand greater influence in the main party, such as in Zimbabwe prior to the 2000 elections, their members have been rebuffed by male party bosses and been referred back to the political obscurity of the "women's corner".

Even though it is doubtful if the women's wings of political parties have ever represented the interests of rural women populations adequately, they did represent in many cases the broadest based and the most institutionalised networks of women, and often the only organisations that reached down to rural women at least in organisational terms. They have often not been replaced by similar institutionalised structures. Alternative women's movements have largely been urban based, led by educated urban women who have little if any relationship to the "grassroots". Localised and formed around particular issues or topics, women's organisations have been unable to garner the widespread support necessary to mobilise and represent all women effectively.

Women's movements have realised that a broader support base is necessary, and following the temporary success of the Women's National Coalition in South Africa, whose women's charter campaign united the broadest ever group of women's organisations in Southern African history in the transition period, women's organisations in other countries have taken up similar strategies. In Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Zambia women's organisations have produced their own women's manifestos in consultation with civil society. Lacking the opening of political transformation, which presented the immediate driving force behind the WNC they have used the democratisation process and/or national elections as occasions to direct their collected demands to governments and political parties.

However, the decline of the WNC after the presentation of the women's charter has suggested that while the diversity of its members was the basis of its success it was also its weakness. Critics and former members have pointed out that the WNC had no formalised voting system, avoided controversial issues for the sake of unity and could thus not move on political issues in any formalised way. Other manifesto networks have been based on even looser ties among constituent member organisations, been made up *ad hoc* of both organisations and individuals, or have, rather, been directed by one organisation in consultation with others. All such networks have faced opposition from both governments and ruling parties. Their members often do not include women's wings, and they are not supported by national machinery for the advancement of women, whose task of coordination they effectively pre-empt.

The problems the WNC had surviving beyond the completion of its immediate task, the charter campaign, and the problems other women's coalitions, networks and lobby groups have had would suggest that unified women's movements which span opposition political parties and NGOs, women politicians, activists and church leaders remain difficult and fraught with tensions. The problems of establishing independent, yet encompassing, women's movements, moreover, have moved beyond overcoming mere differences in personal beliefs and loyalties to party policies, and include power-struggles between various autonomous women's organisations, between autonomous women's organisa-

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tions and ruling party mass women's movements, particularly those that have established legitimacy as mass movements in liberation struggles, and national women's machinery.

Thus attempts to re-build a broad-based women's movement in South Africa have been interpreted, Dan Connell has suggested, "as a provocation by the ANC Women's League" (Connell 1998:201) as indicated by the withdrawal of its members from the WNC after the charter campaign (Hassim 2002). In Namibia, the SWAPO Women's Council felt provoked by the Women's Manifesto Network, apparently because its members were not central to the network's operations. Unfortunately in Namibia the department of women's affairs, which had always urged for the establishment of a national women's organisation to facilitate its task of co-ordinating activities between NGOs and government, has joined forces with the ruling party women against the network.

This would suggest that national machinery is not always as independent as autonomous women's organisations would have hoped for. Even in South Africa, where the national machinery has been strategically placed in a number of institutions, the Commission for Gender Equality, which is to serve as a link between grassroots and government, has been accused of displaying ANC biases in its appointment of commissioners, and CGE members have intimated that budget allocations through another ministry, rather than directly through parliament jeopardise its independence. There have also been critical voices that have suggested that the CGE might have engaged in worthwhile research in areas where legal reforms are needed, but subsequently failed to take government to task for the discrimination they discovered.<sup>1</sup>

In Zambia, the women's movement has grown so disillusioned with the lack of action of the national machinery they took the implementation of the National Gender Policy into their own hands when they presented a Gender Action Plan in 2001, the Support for the Mobilization for Women's Empowerment Movement 2000. It spelled out priorities of the broad Gender Policy and divided tasks between NGOs. Three years later the Gender in Development Division had still not followed suit with an official implementation plan. While NGOs and the GIDD office cooperate occasionally, tensions and mistrust have been high.<sup>2</sup>

Antagonisms between women politicians and the women's movements that dominated newly independent states in the 1970s and 1980s have also not been completely overcome, even though autonomous women's movements have more readily embraced working within government as a valid and necessary strategy. But suspicions towards politicians have remained even if they have risen from their own ranks. Moreover, in South Africa, where many former women leaders exchanged activism for parliament in 1994, their departure has left a void in the grassroots leadership and distances to ordinary women have grown. Ultimately these gaps, identified by women activists – and many of the more critical women MPs – as the tendency of women MPs to empower them-

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1. Likhapha Mbatha, quoted in Commission for Gender Equality 2001.

2. Interviews with members of the NGOCC, Lusaka, May 2002. Meetings of the NGOCC-Donor Forum, Lusaka, NGOCC, Lusaka, May 2002.

selves to the exclusion of others, might initiate antagonisms as former constituencies start to feel that the empowerment of their political sisters fails to have an effect on their own lives. In many cases and countries members of autonomous women's movements have been disappointed by the fact that women politicians have put party loyalty over sisterhood and have defined their constituency in much broader terms.

Women politicians, on the other hand, have dismissed the expectations of the women's movement to represent only their specific feminist agenda, as unrealistic, suggesting that they represent their party rather than a particular lobby. In situations which are not ruled by gender quota, women continue to have a hard time rising in the party hierarchy at the best of times, and being a gender advocate is considered a liability. Already disadvantaged in selection processes women politicians have to engage in patriarchal bargains to minimize their disadvantages. This often means that they choose to tone down whatever feminist beliefs they might hold. Once in government, women fear that too strong a focus on gender concerns might not only threaten their career advancement but might also signal to colleagues unprofessional behaviour and a lack of intellectual capacity, which might jeopardise their effectiveness in addressing important issues, including those concerning women's well-being.

Gender quotas might ease matters for women somewhat, and might enable them to choose gender concerns as a platform, but they also might work against them. Unlike women's movements and lobby groups many women politicians remain sceptical about the benefits of affirmative action since they believe that it exacerbates their problem of not being taken seriously. Politicians who are in favour of affirmative action, by contrast, have suggested that "whether you are a token or not does not depend on those who put you there, it depends on what you are doing".<sup>1</sup> Yet, even in South Africa, where ANC women have benefited from a quota, the electoral system based on proportional representation where MPs have traded the increased possibility to enter national politics for greater dependency on their party bosses, still decides which women are placed where on party lists.

These limitations have raised a number of problems related to representation. That women have a right to be represented as individuals is uncontested, that they have a right to representation as an interest group with distinct agendas and characteristics remains contested. The history of women's participation in politics in Southern Africa, as elsewhere, clearly shows that women do not always represent women's interests, and certainly not the interests of women with a transformative, feminist, agenda. Anne Phillips has reminded us that women's legitimacy in politics is derived from elections, not from nature, and that we cannot assume that a woman politician, just because she is a woman, has a particularly privileged understanding of women's special needs (Phillips 1993:75).

In fact, it is doubtful if women all have the same interests at the same time because they are not a homogenous group. Gender interests intersect with inter-

1. Interview with Frene Ginwala, Cape Town, 22 May 1995.

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ests not only of political parties but also those based on class, race and religion. However, many women politicians and constituencies have maintained that women have a different approach to politics, which tends to be more care oriented, closer to the social issues of survival and is generally speaking more practical. Some women politicians believe that women were simply more direct and wanted to get matters finished soon, rather than talking about them forever, because “they are not afraid to put the thing straight. Men they want to fool around”<sup>1</sup>. But such different approaches to politics do not constitute a common set of interests. One commentator on ANC women’s performance in parliament suggested, for example, that:

A lot of the women in the ANC are still very much on the same track they have been on before, like feminists who came back into the country, they have developed a South African brand of feminism, interested in changing the status quo. But there are also the motherists, and a lot of them feel that it is really great that we have 106 women in parliament, who feel that we have got there, because the ANC punctuates its speeches with a certain amount of gender stuff... there needs to be a regrouping of those who feel that we have not got there yet.<sup>2</sup>

For Thenjiwe Mtinso, as for a number of other ANC MPs, part of the problem has been a conceptual confusion between gender issues and women’s issues, “where nobody thinks that it is a men’s issue”<sup>3</sup>. And the perception that as “women we represent women”, means that “we will be denigrating the important struggle on the fundamental transformation of power relations in society” (Mtinso 1999:37). For Mtinso the “over prioritisation of gender as a social category by which women are particularly marginalised is risky, as it does not problematise the “mainstream” [...] and the continued existence of patriarchal relations within such a democracy are ignored” (Mtinso 1999:37).

Women politicians can only change matters if they are not only able to enter the mainstream but also to change it, and they are less likely to do so if they remain in a women’s corner. The dilemma women politicians face of choosing between raising gender issues (because men do not) and thereby playing into the hands of the status quo or not raising them, also affirming the status quo has remained unsolved, and it will remain so as long as the culture of politics and its institutions do not change. This requires changes in attitudes, not only of male politicians and voters but also changes in attitudes of the women’s movement toward politicians and what they are able to do.

Much has happened in the last decade that has made politics a much more acceptable field for women in Southern Africa too. The SADC Gender Declaration was a regional success for women’s lobbies, even though only a few SADC member states will be able to meet the target of 30 per cent representation of women in 2004. Nonetheless the Declaration has emboldened lobbies and networks to push quota demands up to 50 per cent, a move that has found, per-

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1. Interview, Cape Town, 15 May 1995.  
 2. Interview, Durban, 23 March 1995.  
 3. Interview, Cape Town, 19 May 1995.

haps, more resonance with women politicians<sup>1</sup>, since it represents not so much affirmative action and the representation of special women's interests – rather like a minority – but the recognition of the political legitimacy of women as human beings.

Electorates too, have changed opinions. In Zimbabwe a survey in 2001 revealed that 29 per cent of respondents in the electorate were in favour of equal representation of men and women, and 25 per cent were in favour of having more women politicians. And even though the majority with such views were women (20.5 and 20.9 per cent respectively)<sup>2</sup> this represents a remarkable result, particularly in a country where voter education in gender issues has not been as intensive as it has been in other countries and where the representation of women in the legislature dropped by almost 5 per cent after the 2000 elections. Respondents found that women politicians were more honest, caring and hardworking.<sup>3</sup>

Changes in attitudes have been slower with regard to the relationship between women politicians and the women's movement in the countries surveyed here, no matter how small or large the number of women MPs, and no matter how the conflict between politicians and the autonomous women's movement has been formulated:

There should be no dichotomy between these two strands but they should be seen as interdependent and complementing each other. One needs the other and neither can be successful without the other. (Mtinsio 1999)

Gender transformative agendas cannot be driven by women politicians alone, even if their numbers in parliament have reached what has been described as a critical mass. What is needed is a strong, independent, diverse women's movement, which is able and willing to work with politicians, and able to mobilise women around common interests. Without such a back-up laws at the national level might change but they will not reach the grassroots. And if they do not reach the women and men on the ground, gender gains will backslide. Zimbabwe has been such a case, where traditional authorities have exerted enough influence to make a partial withdrawal of the Legal Age of Majority possible.

In South Africa, throughout the text and in the estimation of the region and the continent presented as the great success story, women activists, academics and politicians reflected during the 2001 gender summit on the successes and failures of the gender project there. Many of the participants were concerned about the fact that the numbers of women in parliament and legal changes had not been sufficiently translated into changes on the ground, and there was consensus among the participants on the urgent need of a national women's movement. Nomthuse Mbere, for example, complained of the lack of an accepted, non-politicised national women's coalition which combines NGOs, political parties and academics. And politician and gender activist Pregs Govender

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1. In Namibia for example, the Namibian Women's Manifesto Network has gained the support of many political parties and women politicians. See Gretchen Bauer, "The Hand That Stirs the Pot Can Also Run the Country": Electing Women to Parliament in Namibia'. Unpublished paper, June 2003.
  2. Women in Parliament Support Unit, 'Baseline Survey', Harare 2001, p. 24
  3. Data of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in National Parliaments*, [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif).

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believed that it was the challenge of the women's movement to strategies on how to engage with the state (Commission for Gender Equality 2001).

Similar problems might pertain to Mozambique where, due to a 30 per cent gender quota adopted by FRELIMO in the 1994 elections women's representation in the legislature women representation increased to 24.4 per cent and has since increased to 30 per cent, even beyond that of South Africa. But here perhaps even more than in South Africa, women's representation is but the first step to changing the situation of women, who are particularly poor and disadvantaged in a country still suffering from the ravages of a long-drawn-out civil war. Women's participation in decision-making is no longer perceived of as a problem, widespread poverty is.<sup>1</sup>

In other countries where women's participation in legislatures and cabinets has been slower to develop, women's movements have made up for the shortcomings, even in the face of cooptation and hostility, as networks, lobbies and coalitions have been formed around the issue of women's political representation. In Zambia the NWLG had a hard time being accepted in the political landscape of the early 1990's but since then the women's movement, represented by the NGOCC, of which the NWLG is a member, has moved further into the centre of political debate, as one of the active member organisations of the Oasis Forum, where its members actively contributed to the campaign in 2001 against the amendment of the constitution to allow Chiluba to stand for a third term of office. Since then the NGOCC has maintained the alliance with other, not necessarily gender focused NGOs, putting pressure on the government to heed demands for a consultative, democratic and gender sensitive constitutional review. Strategic alliances like these are serious and far-reaching successes in mainstreaming gender concerns which deserve to be emulated in other countries.

Most important, perhaps, at all levels, as has been happening in South Africa, must be the realisation that quantitative changes in the number of women in decision-making and of the laws that have been reformed will need qualitative changes within each and every person – men and women, activists inside and outside parliament, in this and that political party. And this presupposes an autonomous and political women's movement as part of civil society which unites conservative villagers with feminist politicians and members of the radical feminist rural women's movement with the conservative woman MP and her male colleagues.

Sylvia Tamale concluded her analysis of women in politics in Uganda by answering the question whether increasing political participation by women in formal politics in her country had changed women or whether women had changed the politics. Both she said had taken place. Women politicians were more self-asserted and ordinary women, she claimed, were emboldened to join politics at the lower levels and to stand up against abusive and controlling husbands. Because gender concerns were no longer easy to ignore politics in Uganda would never be the same again (Tamale 1999:199).

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1. Jacobsen 1995 and personal communications, November 2002.

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The same must be concluded from this book. The engagement with the state, whether within as a politician or outside in the women's movement, has changed the life of many women and the face of politics. Women all over the region have gained from the experience, not least in the willingness to also expose gender inequalities in the home. Gender violence, over and above women's representation in government, has over the decade become a major political issue, finally merging the public and the private.

The face of Southern African politics has thus changed tremendously in the last ten years – and in many places women have moved from being, in the words of Chenjerai Hove, of politics to being in politics, his Zimbabwean sister Margaret Dongo for a period prominently among them. Her tenacity in defending the democratic values she fought for as a guerrilla, and her courage to fight a seemingly monolithic government, inspired not only other women politicians and the electorate but also opposition leaders. Likewise, the South African women who managed to put their differences aside and worked for a common goal in the Women's National Coalition in the transition period, inspired an unheard of quest for women's unity across the region. But these and many other successes have also given rise to a conservative backlash in the name of "tradition". A radical unity in diversity, of rural and urban, old and young, educated and uneducated men and women is needed to challenge the power of those traditions that still continue to hold many African women in virtual bondage.

## Persons Interviewed<sup>1</sup>

### *Zambia, Lusaka – 1994*

Rosalyn Dakka	MMD provincial co-ordinator, Eastern Province (MMD parliamentary candidate in 1991)
Mary Fulanu	Chairperson of Women's Affairs, UNIP
Laurah Harrison	Chairperson, Zambia National Women's Lobby Group (1991/1992)
Elisabeth Kalenga	Councillor, Lusaka District Council, MMD
Chibesa Kankassa	Former leader of the UNIP Women's League and member of the UNIP Central Committee
Chilufya Kapepwe	MMD MP
Kabunda Kayongo	Minister of Community Development and Social Services, MMD
Inonge Lewanika	MP, interim chairperson of the National Party
Sara Longwe	Gender Activist, Zambian Association of Research and Development (ZARD)
Katongo Maine	MMD MP
Sylvia Masebo	Deputy Mayor (Lusaka), MMD
Mrs Matanda	Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Community Development and Social Services
Rose Mulumo	Zambia National Women's Lobby Group (1991/1992)
Gladys Mutukwa	Chairperson of the National Women's Lobby Group
Lilian Mushota	Lawyer, gender activist
Winnie Musonda	Gender advisor, UNDP, gender activist
Honorine Muyoyeta	Consultant, gender activist
Princess Nakatindi	MMD MP, Chairperson of the Department of Women's Affairs MMD, formerly Minister of Community Development and Social Services
Edith Nawakwi	MMD MP, Minister of Energy and Water Development
Lucy Sichone	Human rights activist, former UNIP central committee member
Bernadette Sikanika	Executive member of the UNIP Women's League
Emily Joy Sikazwe	Chairperson, Women for Change (2002)
Chipo Simweemba Lungu	Chairperson, Zambia National Women's Lobby Group (2002)
Wendy Sinkala	MMD MP, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

### *Botswana, Gaborone – 1991 and 1994*

Elsie Alexander	Co-ordinator, Women and the Law in Southern Africa Project (1991 and 1994)
Dr Chiepe	BDP MP, Minister of External Affairs (1994)

1. The positions indicate those held at the time of the interview.

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Pony Hopkins	Gender activist, Emang Basadi, World Vision Botswana (1994)
Ulla Kahn	Senior researcher, National Institute of Research (NIR) (1991)
Lydia Ketlogetswe	BDP, parliamentary candidate 1993 (1994)
M. Kewagamang	Co-ordinator, Women's Affairs Division, Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs (1994)
Elisabeth Kidd	Assistant co-ordinator, Women and the Law in Southern Africa (1991)
Motsei Madisa	BNE, Central Committee member, Emang Basadi (1991 and 1994)
Dorcas Magang	BDP, Central Committee member, office holder in the BDP women's wing (1994)
Julia B. Matumo	BNE, Central Committee member, office holder in the BNF women's wing (1994)
Ataliah Molokomme	University of Botswana (1991), Coordinator, SADC Gender Unit (1998)
Mrs Molomo	BDP, office holder in women's wing (1994)
Ethiopia Mosinyi	Chairperson, Lesedi La Botswana (1994)
Ruth Musete	Botswana Christian Council (1991)
Clara Ohlsen	Editor, Botswana Guardian, Emang Basadi (1994)
S. Seisa	Director of Culture and Social Welfare, Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs (1994)
Gloria Somolekae	University of Botswana, Emang Basadi (1994)
Bamake Tsimako	Senior Rural Sociologist, Ministry of Agriculture (1991)
Mrs. Vanga	Secretary General of the YWCA

*Zimbabwe, Harare – 1994 and 1995*

Alice Armstrong	Regional Co-ordinator, Women and the Law in Southern Africa Project (1991)
Judith Chikore	Director of Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (1994)
Ruth Chinamano	ZANU (PF) MP
Florence Chitauru	ZANU(PF) MP, Deputy Minister of Labour (1994)
Grace Chiura	Department of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Political Affairs (1991)
Trudi Dickey	Parliamentary candidate of the Forum Party (1995)
Margaret Dongo	ZANU(PF) MP (1994), Independent MP (1995)
Winnie Dzingayi	ZANU(PF) parliamentary candidate (1995)
Elizabeth Gwaunza	National Co-ordinator, Women and the Law in Southern Africa Project (1994)
Mrs Hungwe	ZANU(PF) MP, Deputy Minister of Health (1995)
Kwanele Ona Jirira	University of Zimbabwe, gender activist (1994)
Joyce Kazembe	Southern African Political and Economic Series (SAPES) (1994)

*Persons Interviewed*

Mrs Lesabe	ZANU(PF) MP, Minister of Education (1995)
Olivia Muchena	ZANU (PF) MP
Brigit Mugabe	Head, Women's Affairs Unit, Ministry of National Affairs (1994)
Joyce Mujuru	ZANU(PF) MP, Governor of Harare
Betty J. Mtero	Chairperson, Zimbabwe Women's Forum (1994)
S. Nyoni	ZANU(PF) MP, Deputy Minister of Housing and Public Construction (1995)
Oppah Rushesha	ZANU(PF) MP, Deputy Minister of Environment (1994)
Everjoice Win	Programme Officer, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) (1994), Women Action Group (WAG)
Irene Zindi	ZANU(PF) Women's League, Chairperson of Zimbabwe Association of War Veterans (1994) ZANU(PF)MP (1995)

*South Africa, Cape Town and Durban – 1995, 1996, 2000*

Sheila Camerer	NP MP, Deputy Minister of Justice (1996)
Esme Joy Chait	NP MP (1995)
Patricia De Lille	PAC MP (1995)
Thembeke Gamndama	ANC Senator (1996)
Frene Ginwala	ANC MP, Speaker of Parliament (1995)
Pregs Govender	ANC MP (1996)
Patricia Horn	Chairperson, Self-Employed Women's Union (SEWU), Durban (1995)
Brigitte Mabandla	ANC MP, Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture (1996)
Mavivi Manzini	ANC MP (1995)
Thenjiwe Mtinso	ANC MP, SACP Central Committee (1995)
Lauretta Ngcobo	IFP MPP (KwaZulu/Natal Provincial Parliament) (2000)
Harriet Ngubane	IFP MP (1995)
Dorothy Nyembe	ANC MP (1995)
Naledi Pandor	ANC MP (1996)
Jenny Schreiner	ANC MP (1996)
Gertrude Shope	ANC MP (1996)
Albertina Sisulu	ANC MP (1995)
Mary Turok	ANC MP (1995 and 1996)

*Namibia, Windhoek – 1991 and 1998*

Othilie Abrahamsen	Namibian Women's Association, formerly NNF member (1991 and 1998)
Nora Chase	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, former ambassador to Germany (1991 and 1998)
Liz Frank	Editor, Sister Namibia (1998 and 2004)
Dianne Hubbard	Legal Assistance Centre
Michaela Hübschle	SWAPO MP, Deputy Minister of Prisons & Correctional Services (1998)

*Gisela Geisler*

Eunice Ipinge	Gender Unit, University of Namibia, executive member of SWAPO Women's Council (1998)
Gertrude Kandanga	SWAPO MP (1998)
Maria Kapere	Co-ordinator of Women's Desk, Office of the President (1991) Department of Environment (1998)
Vicky Kaura	DTA MP
Mary D. Munihango	Ex-combatant, PLAN (1998)
Netumbo Ndaitwah	Director General, Department of Women's Affairs (1998)
Helene Samuels	Councillor, Windhoek Council, SWAPO (1998)
Loide Shenewene	Ministry of Agriculture (1998)
Pashukeni Shombe	SWAPO MP, Chairperson of the Parliamentary Women's Caucus
Patricia Siska	DTA MP

*Mozambique, Maputo – 1991*

Isabel Casimiro	Eduardo Mondlane University, Co-ordinator, Women and the Law in Southern Africa
Asa Guambe	Women Programme Officer, Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA)
Gloria Lieberman	Independent consultant, gender activist
Henny A. Matos	Association of Professional and Business Women

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## Abbreviations

AAWORD	Association of African Women for Research and Development
ANC	African National Congress (South Africa)
ANC NEC	African National Congress/National Executive Committee
ANCWL	The ANC's Bantu Women's League
BC	Black Consciousness (South Africa)
BCW	Botswana Council of Women
BDP	Botswana Democratic Party
BNF	Botswana National Front
BWF	Black Women's Federation (South Africa)
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CCN	Council of Churches in Namibia
CCP	Convention People's Party (Ghana)
CEDAW	UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CGE	Commission for Gender Equality (South Africa)
CNU	Caucus for National Unity (Zambia)
COD	Congress of Democrats (South Africa)
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
DTA	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (Namibia)
DWA	Department of Women's Affairs (Namibia)
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
FEDSAW/FSAW	Federation of South African Women
FRELIMO	Mozambique Liberation Front/Frente de Libertação de Moçambique
GAC	Gender Advisory Committee (South Africa)
GIDD	Gender and Development Division (Zambia)
IDASA	Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
IWB	Inkatha Women's Brigade
KANU	Kenya African National Union
LAMA	Legal Age of Majority Act (Zimbabwe)
MCDWA	Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs (Zimbabwe)
MK	Umkonktho we Sizwe/The Spear of the National (South Africa)
MMD	Movement for Multiparty Democracy (Zambia)
MPLA	Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola/Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
MPNP	Multi-Party Negotiation Process (South Africa)
MYWO	Maendeleo ya Wanawake (A national women's organisation, Kenya)
NANAWO	Namibian National Women's Organisation
NANGOF	Namibian Non-Governmental Organisations' Forum
NAWA	Namibian Women's Organisation
NCDP	National Commission for Development Planning (Zambia)
NGOCC	Non-Governmental Coordination Committee

*Abbreviations*

NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NNF	Namibia National Front
NOW	Natal Organisation of Women
NP	National Party (South Africa)
NWLG	National Women's Lobby Group (Zambia)
NWV	Namibian Women's Voice
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OMA	Organisation of Angolan Women
OMM	Organisation of Mozambican Women
OSW	Office of the Status of Women (South Africa)
OXFAM	The Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
PAIGC	African Independence Party of Guinea and Cap Verde/ Pardido Africano para a Independência do Cabo Verde
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Plan
RWM	Rural Women's Movement (South Africa)
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCC	Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference
SWANU	South West Africa National Union
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
SWC	SWAPO Women's Council
TANU	Tanzania African National Union
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UDF	United Democratic Front (South Africa)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIP	United Independence Party (Zambia)
UPP	United People's Party (Zambia)
UWO	United Women's Organisation (South Africa)
UWT	Umoja wa Wanawake wa Tanzania (A national women's organisation)
WAG	Women's Action Group (Zimbabwe)
WID	Women in Development
WNC	Women's National Coalition (South Africa)
WNL	Women's National Lobby (South Africa)
WPG	Women's Parliamentary Group (South Africa)
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU(PF)	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZARD	Zambia Association for Research and Development
ZAWU	Zimbabwe African Women's Union
ZDC	Zambia Democratic Congress
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army

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