

**THE MOBILISATION OF WOMEN: THE BLACK WOMEN'S FEDERATION 1975-1977:  
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO NATAL.**

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## INTRODUCTION

That the role of women in the mainstream of South African historiography has been omitted, understated or simply glossed over, is widely accepted today. Significant works, such as J. Wells' study on 'The History of Black Women's Struggle Against Pass Laws in South Africa 1900-1960' (1982) and Cherryl Walker's Women and Resistance in South Africa, (1982) amongst others, show in no uncertain way that the role of women and the women's movement are worthy of study as a field in itself. More recently the Conference on Women and Gender in Southern Africa held at the University of Natal in 1991 is proof of the expanding field and what may be widely termed 'Gender Studies' in South Africa.

Women's movements, such as the ANC Women's League (ANCWL), operating as a separate body within the African National Congress (ANC) have been much influenced by the parent body. Decisions such as whether to continue with anti-pass protests or not as was the case in Johannesburg in 1958, saw the superior power of the ANC prevail over the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) and ANCWL.

I therefore saw the possibility of researching a women's organisation which appeared to operate comparatively freely from such 'constraints'. Also an investigation of a possible 'continuity' in the trends and tenets of women's resistance since the 1950's appeared challenging. The Black Women's Federation (BWF), formed in 1975, provided this opportunity.

Despite the apparent latitude for women in the BWF to organise themselves free from patriarchal authority, the BWF entrenched itself in the political base of Black Consciousness (BC) of the 1970s. This political base which arose from the inspiration of the

South African Students Organisation (SASO), did not display any special empathy for the position of women as an oppressed gender. In fact SASO displayed the stereotypes that characterised male and female relations in society as a whole. These issues on gender relations and the constraints on women at the level of political organisation provided an avenue for investigation.

The BWF's comparative autonomy however, did not detract from its primary objective of national liberation for all oppressed South Africans in a democratic South Africa. This is another point of significance of the study of the BWF. It was the first attempt by Black women since the demise of the FSAW in the 1960s to forge a national alliance for the express purpose of furthering the demands of Black women within the context of national liberation in the 1970s.

While operating under the banner of its independently defined objectives, the BWF existed under far more repressive political circumstances than did previous women's movements. In addition to those laws which limited and curtailed the opposition of the FSAW in the 1950s, the 1970s witnessed the total effect of the increased number of laws subsequent to the 1950s, designed to intensify repression. Discussed in Chapter Three these laws displayed the renewed determination of the state to suppress apartheid dissidents when opposition to apartheid was revived through the principles of Black Consciousness. In these circumstances, mass actions such as those which typified the FSAW's stand earlier were unlikely to succeed.

What resulted from the BC stand was the attempt to conscientize Blacks about the disabilities and oppression resulting from apartheid. In this context the particular focus of women in the BWF was to point out the special effects of these disabilities on Black

women. In this regard its main focus was identification of apartheid disabilities as militating chiefly against the unity of the Black family in which women viewed their roles as pivotal. Their views, aims and specific objectives, within the constraints of apartheid laws, emerged from their crucial role in the family and motherhood.

This study does not take as given the inherently political nature of all women, committed to political change. Rather it focuses on a small group of middle class Black women who saw as their task the conscientizing of women through programmes of upliftment and self-help with a comparatively longer term aim of constitutional redress through the repeal of all discriminatory legislation. It is clear that these women who mobilised as a group, prioritized issues of national liberation which effectively overshadowed those of gender discrimination.

The study of a women's political organisation serves another function: the opportunity to probe into the quality of women's action which was uniquely theirs. By this I mean, that while conceding to the crucial effects of apartheid on Blacks, I try to highlight its effects on and the subsequent responses of women in particular.

The study has been organised in five chapters. The efforts of the membership of the BWF as a whole will be highlighted, with the particular focus of their activities being Natal, since the major efforts of the BWF were initially identified in Natal, with Natal delegates playing a leading role in these activities.

Chapter One provides a brief background of patriarchy and the position of Black women, with reference to African and Indian women. This chapter presents a sketch of the levels of employment and economic activity of women in the period under review.

Chapter Two presents a historical account of the mobilisation of women throughout the twentieth century, with particular reference to the FSAW. The FSAW can be considered the most popular and successful organisation of women in the period preceding the bannings of the 1960s. The emphasis on the FSAW also serves to highlight some of the principles of this organisation which were revived from the 'Women's Charter' by the BWF in 1975. In this regard the FSAW can be argued to be a forerunner to the BWF with one notable difference: the FSAW was a multi-racial organisation, while the BWF was exclusive to Black membership. It was the latter's organisation under the tenets of Black Consciousness (BC), that inspired this fundamental difference.

Chapter Three discusses Black Consciousness (BC), the political context in which the BWF was formed. This chapter serves to contextualize the formation and activities of the BWF and relate them to the wider activities of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM).

Chapter Four on the BWF highlights the conception, formation and activities of this organisation with special reference to its inaugural conference in December 1975. The issues that touched women mostly are emphasized in the context of the mobilisation and resistance of Black women.

In Chapter Five I discuss the activities of the BWF after its launch. It was in the period of the first six months in 1976 that the most successful activities of the BWF were recorded. This was so because it was the only period in which it operated unhampered by state security interference. The chapter concludes with the banning of the organisation's key members, followed by the banning of the BWF a year later along with all BC-affiliated organisations.

Finally, a word about sources. The study has been undertaken through an analysis of primary material pertaining to the BWF and its activities, supplemented by secondary material especially in the earlier chapters. From the outset I recognised the desirability of interviewing key informants involved with this organisation. This has unfortunately not been successful and I only managed to interview one member, Zubeida Seedat. Some of the difficulties such as not being able to trace whereabouts of some past members and the unavailability of others have contributed to this position. This has indeed created an unfortunate gap in the study, especially given the paucity of documentary material on the organisation. This however did not affect the importance of researching the Black Women's Federation as an important political organisation of its period. I have in the light of the above attempted to produce a complete and objective account of the BWF.



## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND; THE POSITION OF BLACK WOMEN; PATRIARCHY, ITS HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT, LEVELS OF EMPLOYMENT AND THE 'NATAL CODE'.

This Chapter sketches background conditions for the mobilisation of women in the 1970s. The concept of patriarchy and its historical precedents are briefly discussed in relation to African and Indian women. It was women in these two race groups who, along with some Coloured women, united to form the Black Women's Federation (BWF) in 1975.

Following each discussion on patriarchy, is an analysis of the levels of employment of Black women in the period under review which serves to contextualize the discussion on the BWF. Exponents of this, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), emphasised that the apartheid laws which it viewed as oppressive to Blacks, determined their principle of opposition and organisational involvement in this period. To illustrate the specific effects of these laws on the position of women, with special reference to African women, the Natal Code is discussed. The use of Black, as inclusive of the three disadvantaged race groups above, was the stand adopted by the BCM in the 1970s. This view contributed to the empathetic involvement of these groups under the banner of the BWF.

## PATRIARCHY AND THE ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN WOMEN

### HISTORICALLY

Patriarchy is generally defined as male authority over women. The subordination of women which arises from this is deeply rooted in political, economical and social practices. In society these inequalities have been accepted by many women in the name of 'tradition', and this has become the norm with little or no deviation from practices of sexual inequality.

In pre-capitalist African societies the sexual division of labour was apparent from the organisation of the homestead. Men were concerned with cattle and other livestock while women were confined to agriculture and domestic chores. Homesteads were linked as a political unit under the authority of a chief. The lineage of power and control in both the cases of the homestead and chiefdoms passed through male lines, in what may be termed patriarchal regeneration.<sup>1</sup>

Fundamental to these patriarchally defined divisions was the reproductive capacity of women which, according to Guy, was of paramount importance to the structure of pre-capitalist societies. The importance of an understanding of the role of women in this context is crucial to an analysis of the position of women in later and contemporary society.<sup>2</sup>

Historically then, the socially constructed categories of the way women were viewed - as instruments of reproduction for example - and the higher values attached to activities which involved men, such as the control of cattle, cumulatively raised the status of men while it

devalued that of women, perpetuating the unequal relations that have typified men and women since pre-capitalist times. This inequality was imported and distorted by capitalism, colonialism and eventually, the context of this research, by apartheid.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the British Empire, the interaction of race and imperialism was evident. Thus although the 'universals' of patriarchy, such as the general devaluation of female labour, can be argued to affect both Black and White women, the differences in race and culture between them were to counter a possible recognition of a common 'sisterhood'.<sup>4</sup> Adding to this divide was the materially disproportionate position between Black and White women. This had the effect of drawing Black women together. Thus in terms of 'gender solidarity' there was less in common between White and Black women. Rather as laws came to be applied, in the racially divided context of apartheid, Black women identified closer with Black men than with White women.

### LEVELS OF EMPLOYMENT AMONG AFRICAN WOMEN

By 1930 migrant labour had been established as a dominant force in the social and economic life of Africans. This gender specific system accelerated rural poverty, forcing women to abandon their rural homes. The increased urban migration of women in this context of poverty and family dislocation immediately became a source of 'concern' to the authorities. Thus to those involved with the preservation of the migratory labour system, the subjection of women to the rural homestead was vital. In this regard the state supported 'traditionalism' which confined women to the rural economy. These views served to combine in 'collusion' against the movement of women to urban centres. As Walker puts it:

Here the gender ideologies of coloniser and colonised converged, the race attitudes of the colonisers adding a further twist to their exaggerated conception of the subordinate status of African women.<sup>5</sup>

The major flow of African women into urban areas however went ahead. The 1920's thus witnessed a steady stream of mainly single or unattached women to, for example, the Witwatersrand.<sup>6</sup> Being single was one factor that promoted the view of these early female migrants as whores. Eales asserts:

Once there, they faced a harsh welcome. Few white households were prepared to employ black women as domestic workers, as such women were viewed as unreliable and immoral.<sup>7</sup>

So while single males in urban areas were economically desirable and morally acceptable, the blatant gender discrimination to which African women were subjected made their lot in urban areas a precarious one from the very outset.

Between 1921 and 1936 the number African of women in urban areas increased by 142%.<sup>8</sup> Employment opportunities for them only opened up in the 1940s and especially in the post War (1945) period of secondary industrial expansion and when male labourers vacated domestic service employment for low status job demands in industry.

In these circumstances the continued expansion by women of the informal sector of employment which became an important source of survival, took place. Noteworthy in Natal were hawking, prostitution, selling of illicit liquor, the latter for which Cato Manor

near Durban became popular. In the case of Cato Manor the concerns of women beer brewers ("shebeen queens") reflected more than an interest in the protection of a source of revenue. For when they were threatened with closure by the introduction of municipal beer halls their boycott of these facilities would in addition to serving the interests of shebeen queens, keep their men from "drinking money before they can come home and feed us and their children".<sup>9</sup> Thus women displayed more receptiveness to the social plight of the family than the men in Cato Manor. Their constant criticism of the lack of concern of their men and their greater concern for the threatened municipal destruction of their shantytowns and removal to Kwa Mashu reflected this. As Edwards asserts:

Out of concern for the maintenance of the nuclear family structure, problems of meeting household budgets or the desire to profit from the illicit sale of liquor to men, came vociferous criticism of African men in Mkhumbane (Cato Manor).<sup>10</sup>

The constricted labour opportunities in urban areas and the expansion of the informal sector as a strategy for survival, confined Black women to the bottom of the heap. While the range of employment of African women reflects the pattern of employment of women throughout the world, the important mediating variable was racial stratification which accorded White women better jobs while Black women, Africans particularly, were placed at the bottom of the employment hierarchy.

Of particular importance was the concentration of 80% of African women in urban areas in the mid seventies in domestic service.<sup>11</sup> Employed mostly in what has been termed "services" sector employment, 92% of this category in 1970 included African domestic workers.<sup>12</sup> Meer comments on this tradition of female employment as follows:

While the Black (women) with few exceptions, were domestic servants, the White women in the service sector were in the main employed in institutions, in hotels and clubs and as nurses and nurse aids in hospitals. The domestic servant in the 1920s was overwhelmingly an African male, cooking cleaning and baby sitting. By 1980 the African male was firmly ensconced in industry, and the African female was the most ubiquitous domestic servant in South Africa.<sup>13</sup>

Together with the increased number of women wage earners in the 1970s was an increase in the number of female-headed households. This pattern argues Posel is revealed in several studies which have shown that since the 1940s, the number of female-headed households in urban areas increased dramatically.<sup>14</sup> Another study found that 30% of African households in metropolitan areas and 47% of households in bantustan rural areas were headed by women by the end of the decade (1970s).<sup>15</sup> Together with the increased entry of Black women into wage labour the mobilisation of women was given greater scope for expansion. This was achieved by the implicit challenge that financial independence posed to traditional stereotypes of domesticity and subordination that typified the role of women.

However while the increased numbers of African women in wage employment was significant, they had little access to the higher status occupations such as the professions as the following table reveals. This is important in that statistically and historically this latter group constituted the very small minority, from which members of the BWF were drawn in the 1970s, and the figures of Black women in the professions reveals this.

TABLE OF WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT CATEGORISED AS PROFESSIONAL  
IN 1970 <sup>16</sup>

|          | %    |
|----------|------|
| WHITE    | 17,9 |
| AFRICAN  | 2,7  |
| COLOURED | 6,1  |
| INDIAN   | 9,3  |

Even by the end of the decade the distribution of occupations was racially highly skewed, perpetuating the pattern discussed above. White women still occupied the majority of positions in the 'higher' professional, managerial and clerical categories while Black women were crowded into the 'lower' or menial occupations. The following figures reveal this.

TABLE REPRESENTING THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN EMPLOYED  
PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL OCCUPATIONS' IN 1980 <sup>17</sup>

|          | %    |
|----------|------|
| WHITE    | 50,8 |
| AFRICAN  | 35,5 |
| COLOURED | 10,8 |
| INDIAN   | 2,9  |

At the outset then the impetus in the 1970s for the formation of a body that envisaged the representation of Black women nationally, came not from the masses but from the politically elite. As Black Consciousness activist Mamphela Ramphele describes them:

These women comprised professionals: nurses, particularly in the Natal region, social workers, teachers, ministers' wives (the women's wing of the Inter-Denominational African Ministers' Association of South Africa), medical doctors and so on.<sup>18</sup>

### PATRIARCHY AND THE ORGANISATION OF INDIAN WOMEN HISTORICALLY

The situation of Indian women in the 1970s is best presented by an analysis of their position in the family and marriage. This is so because it is the joint family which has had a considerable influence on interpersonal, kinship and community relations among Indians.<sup>19</sup> The distinctive dichotomy between female and male begins at an early age with specific activities designed for boys and girls each excluding the other. The emphasis on the status of being male is highlighted in many spheres of social and cultural practices among Indians. To begin with the overt desire to bear males is clearly expressed among the family with such concerns as the perpetuation of the 'family name' and care of parents in old age being expressed as reasons for this.

Despite the prevalence of the nuclear family today, as late as the mid sixties the joint family system was quite extensive among Indians. One study in 1968 revealed that of 107 families in five Durban areas - Tin Town, Asherville, Overport, Mayville and Durban Central - 50% of families in higher income groups, 30% in the lower income range and 20% in the middle groups were joint.<sup>20</sup> Even in the 1970s then, the position of Indian women was influenced by the joint family.



The position of women and men was also strongly influenced by the patriarchal nature of their religions, Hinduism and Islam in the main. There is tacit agreement that women are subordinate to men. Women do not make decisions freely or visit friends or relatives in an individual capacity. When a wife does operate relatively freely it is due either "to the goodness or weakness of her husband".<sup>21</sup> Husbands are 'affectionately condescending' to their wives whom they view as needing protection and guidance. Thus the ideal woman was presented as "chaste, humble, loyal and submissive", confined to the protective environment of the home.<sup>22</sup>

But while these practices can be termed patriarchal, "this submission was not necessarily construed as oppression", according to Hilda Kuper.<sup>23</sup> Her ethnographic researches among Indians in the late 1950s, revealed for example, the Hindu wife as "subservient to her husband but not inferior" in terms of the culturally defined male and female relations.<sup>24</sup>

The perceptions of this submission as not designating inferiority can be argued to have arisen from the holy writings of both Hindu and Islamic scriptures, both of which revere women, "particularly as mothers, and the mother cult survives strongly even today".<sup>25</sup> These images of motherhood and women in need of protection and care have tacitly served to justify the subjugation of women.

In recent years, however, the view of Indian woman as docile, chaste, subordinate and domesticated have been challenged to re-evaluation. Chetty for example, argues that the constancy of these images is "racist, contentious or fallacious". He goes on to suggest that its 'correction' lies in unpacking these images and their constancy through an examination of the participation of Indian women in South African politics.<sup>26</sup>

The perpetuation of such images, whether fallacious or not, can in large measure be accounted for by the dearth of academic research on the position of Indian women in most spheres as well as on the confinement of the majority of them to the obscurity of their homes away from public affairs. As Mesthrie notes:

As women did not play a role in the Indian political organisations at least until the late 1930's - and then too only on a limited scale - their existence in standing histories remains noticeably absent.<sup>27</sup>

### LEVELS OF EMPLOYMENT AMONG INDIAN WOMEN

Views on the domesticity of Indian women are given plausibility when one examines their low employment in the formal sector. In 1936 a mere 3,710 Asian women or 7,3% of those over 15 years were found to be 'economically active', compared to 33% of Coloured and 19,4% of White women. Even as late as 1960, only 4,9% of Indian women of all ages were "economically active".<sup>28</sup>

The position of Indian women in education reflected the same disproportion as that in employment. In 1927 for instance, there were 9477 Indian children in school of whom only 1650 were girls and few went beyond standard four.<sup>29</sup> In 1948 Indian girls constituted approximately 24% of the total enrolment of schools and in 1966 about 38%. As late as 1972 this figure was 42%.<sup>30</sup>

With the extension of higher education, especially after the 1960s, and the increasing involvement of Indian women outside the arena of the domestic, the image of the submissive wife began to give way to demands for power and equality within the family. This has given rise to two distinct groups of women, elevated though not exempt from traditionally prescribed rules relating to their status: the professional and the woman worker. The former share with men the role of breadwinners. However they are never relieved of the burden of domestic labour even by virtue of their 'emancipation'. As Meer concludes:

the professional Indian woman is keen to impress her domestic prowess, as if they attest to her otherwise challenged femininity.<sup>31</sup>

In the working class, women's employment occurs largely in production, sales and service sectors. For example the clothing industry which prior to 1960 had been dominated by Indian men, came to be dominated by Indian women. In the 1970s there was a marked entry of African women to this arena of employment as well. So in approximately three decades between 1937 and 1970, the composition of the labour force in the garment industry had changed dramatically by race and sex. During 1937 and 1938 the employees were predominantly White with over 50% being White women workers. By 1970 it was predominantly Black, White workers having dropped to less than 5%.<sup>32</sup>

Even in these dramatically changed circumstances, cultural constraints continued to limit the entry of Indian women into formal employment relative to women of other racial groups .

Indian women workers began to share much in common with their Coloured and African counterparts - low wages, lack of social security and little or no incentive for promotion. Yet despite these common factors Indian women together with their African counterparts show a low input into labour organisation and resistance to exploitation. Far from waged work serving any consciousness raising function regarding their position as women, one study among Black factory workers in Durban as late as 1984 revealed that :

the woman worker, in fact, seeks employment to preserve the family and family values. She hurries home at the end of the day, so that she can assume her 'proper' role as mother and wife.<sup>33</sup>

This lack of political consciousness among the working class Indian woman accorded the initiative of political mobilisation to the educated elite women. As outlined earlier this was also the case among African women. A study of the names of the Indian women who were elected onto the executive of the BWF as well as those who were actively involved in the launch of the organisation, reveals this initiative as belonging to the politically educated middle class women. Names such as those of Fatima Meer (lecturer), Ruth Paul (teacher) Zubeida Seedat (attorney) and Margaret Naidoo (professional) represent those of the professional women while those names as Fatima Meer, go back to political activism in the 1940s.

This however does not deny the involvement and valuable contributions of non-professional Indian woman to the success of political resistance. To the contrary, much of the success of the initiatives and objectives of organisations such as the FSAW in the 1950s was dependent on grass roots membership, and the attempts of the BWF to reach this

membership through initiatives such as self-help schemes, is indicative of the relevance of all women to the success of its programmes. The BWF however could not claim the mass support of the kind the FSAW had in the 1950s. Part of this reason lies with the nature of the mobilisation of women in the latter period, where there were no mass campaigns against racial discrimination in view of the harsher security laws preventing such action.

The 1970s however, with the increased number of women in formal employment, indicated the possibility for mobilisation and involvement of Indian women in programmes concerned with community upliftment, amongst others. The efforts of Indian women in the BWF in such activity was evident during the floods of 1976, when the settlement in Tin Town was destroyed. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

### THE 'NATAL CODE' OF BLACK LAW

In addition to the restrictions on Black women outlined above, there were disabilities directly dictated by law. In Chapters Two and Three I discuss the effects of the Pass Laws on African women in the period under review. Here I have singled out the Natal Code of Black Law, commonly referred to as the Natal Code, for its effects on African women. Although not having originated under apartheid, its continued application in the period of the 1970s sparked opposition to its oppressive provisions.

The implementation of the Natal Code in 1891 goes back to the period of European colonisation and westernisation, both of which had significant bearing on the status of African women.<sup>34</sup> Though the extent of the effects of these influences differ with the

degree to which regions were exposed to them, for more than a century, European courts have administered civil law regarding Africans and have assumed the right to decide what customs shall or shall not be recognised.<sup>35</sup>

While under common law majority status for both men and women is attained upon reaching the age of 21 years, or upon marriage, by contrast, an African woman under the Natal Code and customary law elsewhere in South Africa was always subject to the guardianship of a man and is "condemned to perpetual minority".<sup>36</sup>

Having undergone several changes since its introduction, the Code in the main relegated women to the position of perpetual subordination to a male guardian such as her father, husband, son or in the absence of these men, another male relative whom she may not have known. The Code's stipulation regarding the ownership of property was oppressive. A woman could not acquire property in her own right, and even assets given to her by her father when she entered a customary union, "become the property of and belong to the house established by such union".<sup>37</sup>

The results of the enactment of the Code were then generally unfavourable to women, as it "stereotypes a concept of feminine inferiority unknown in traditional society, and burdens women in Natal with disabilities that they did not suffer in other provinces."<sup>38</sup>

However the Code did make provision for emancipation. This exemption accordingly "extended" the privilege to a wife who was married to the "holder of letters" or to any unmarried woman, widow or divorced, specifically owning fixed property, having good

character, education and thrifty habits.<sup>39</sup> Although according women this "privilege" the Code's denial of the right of women to own fixed property as well as its emphasis on "letters", made the possibility for emancipation of most women remote.<sup>40</sup>

With the resurgence of resistance politics in the 1970s, invoked by the rise of Black Consciousness, the effects of legal subordination of women assumed prominence. Women associated with the BWF and other women's organisations who understood the legal implications of the application of the Natal Code began to articulate their repulsion of it, calling for its scrapping.

One of the executive officials of the BWF and a legal expert of the organisation, Zubie Seedat, speaking on the occasion of the International Women's Year Natal Teach-In in 1975, argued in her analysis of the effects of the Code:

It is producing an unbearable kind of male chauvinism, vindicated by law. The Natal Code has not only firmly entrenched the principle of African male domination, but increased it. The status of African women, for all their growing importance in the African economy, remains depressed.<sup>41</sup>

Given its origins and application in an agrarian society it is clear that the Natal Code was archaic and outdated for the new urbanised setting to which it now applied. It entrenched male domination, investing men with dictatorial and unfettered powers which did not bind family relations, but alienated women from men. Its withdrawal, it was claimed, would rectify the positions of dominance and subservience that typified African female and male relations, especially in marriage.<sup>42</sup>

This then was the position of Black women in the period of the 1970s. Yet despite the factors that controlled the lives of women, they had been able in many instances, to rise above these and mobilise with great political effect. The period of the 1950s saw the rise of the powerful Federation of South African Women (FSAW) and its mass campaigns against passes. It is to the early mobilisation of women that I now turn.

Footnote:

1. J. Guy, 'Gender oppression in southern Africa's pre-capitalist societies', In C. Walker (ed), Women and Gender in Southern Africa, Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1990. pp. 34,35
2. Ibid. p.4
3. Once male control over female labour power was superseded by concerns of wages and cash income earned through external colonial markets, the pre-capitalist phase where the structural centrality of gender was integral to the organisation of society, had effectively ended. (Walker (ed), op. cit. p. 8)
4. Walker (ed), op. cit. p.11, asserts in one such example that "class based attitudes towards domestic workers assumed a racial form: many of the attributes of inferiority associated with domestic servants were transferred to Blacks".
5. Ibid. p.180
6. L. Guma, 'Women, Wage Labour and National Liberation', In R. Cohen. Y. Muthien and A. Zegeye, Repression and Resistance: Insiders Account of Apartheid, Oxford: Hans Zel Publishers, 1990. p.275
7. K. Eales, 'Good Girl vs Bad Girls', In Agenda, No.4 1989. p. 1
8. Guma, op. cit. p. 275
9. I. L. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane Our Home: African Shantytown Society in Cato Manor Farm 1946-1960', Unpublished Phd., University of Natal, 1989. p.312
10. Ibid. p. 312
11. Nancy van Vuuren, Women Against Apartheid: The Fight For Freedom in South Africa 1920-1975, California: Robert D. Reed and Adams S. Eterovich Publishers, 1979. p.7
12. Guma, op. cit. p. 276



13. F. Meer, Black - Woman - Worker. A Study in Patriarchy and Women Production Workers in South Africa, Durban: IBR, 1990.p.54
14. D. Posel, 'Women's Power, men's authority: rethinking patriarchy', Paper presented at Conference on Women and Gender in Southern Africa, University of Natal. 1991. p.3
15. Study by Simkins 1986 pp.33-38 in Gaitskell et al., Mother's Of The Nation: A comparative analysis of nation, race and motherhood in Afrikaner nationalism and the African National Congress; in Nira Yuval Davis Etal (eds) Women-Nation-State, London: MacMillan, 1989, p72.
16. F. Meer, Black-Women-Worker, op. cit. p.58
17. P. Pillay, 'Women in Employment in South Africa: Some Important Trends and Issues', In Social Dynamics 11 (2) 20 - 37 1985, p.27
18. M. Ramphele, 'The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations: A Personal View', in N.B. Pityana et al (eds), Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko, Cape Town; David Philip, 1991. p.215
19. A joint family refers to a family system in which more than one nuclear family representing mainly paternal kin live together.
20. S. Jithoo, 'The Development Cycle of the Indian Family in Durban 1968', quoted in F. Meer, Portrait of Indian South Africans, Durban: Premier Press, 1969. p. 236
21. F. Meer, Ibid. p. 70
22. D. Chetty, 'Sammy' and 'Mary' Go To Gaol: Indian Women and South African Politics in the 1940's', Paper Presented at the Conference on Women and Gender in Southern Africa, University of Natal. 1991. p.4
23. H. Kuper, Indian People in Natal, Durban: University of Natal Press, 1960. p. 117
24. Ibid. p.117
25. Jo Beall, 'Women under Indentured Labour in Colonial Natal 1860-1911', In C.Walker (ed), Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945, Cape Town: David Philip, 1990. p.149
26. Chetty, op. cit. p.1
27. U.S. Mesthrie, 'From rose day shows to social welfare': white and Indian women in joint co-operation in the 1930's', Paper presented at the Conference on Women and Gender in South Africa, University of Natal, 1991. p.1
28. C.Walker, Women and Resistance, London: Onyx Press, 1982 p106
29. Ibid. p.4
30. Ibid. p.90
31. F. Meer, 1969, op. cit. p.71
32. F. Meer, 1990, op. cit. p.64
33. Ibid. p.40
34. The Code of 1878 which served as a guide for colonial judicial officers first became law in Zululand by Proclamation 2 of 1877.
35. M. de Haas, Working Paper , 'African Women Marriage and the not so very Customary Law in Natal', University of Natal,

- January 1988. pp.2-6.
36. A. Rycroft (ed), Race and Law in South Africa, Cape Town: Juta and Co, 1987. p. 140
  37. H.S. Simons, African Women: Their Legal Status in South Africa, Netherlands: Northwestern University Press, 1968. pp.204.205.
  38. Ibid. p.26. This dual legal system operated in other parts of South Africa, but different colonies developed their separate systems as regards tribal customs and its recognition and regulation. The Natal Code was likewise specific to Natal.
  39. Simons, op. cit. pp.206,207
  40. Ibid.
  41. Z.Seedat 'The Legal Disabilities of African Women', In South African Women Speak, Proceedings of the IWYN Teach-in Durban, 1975.
  42. Rycroft (ed), op. cit. p.140 Led by the changes introduced to the Kwa Zulu Code and the major advances it made in rescuing African women from perpetual minority, the 1980's marked the end too of the application of the Natal Code. Three provisions which effectively marked the end of the application of the Code were the recognition of women as majors on attainment of the age of 21. Termination of the need to apply for "emancipation" and the retention of property in a woman's name on the death of her husband, bringing the legal lot of women in line with that prevailing in other areas. The husbands marital power in respect of a customary marriage however still cannot be excluded.

## CHAPTER TWO

### POLITICAL ORGANISATION OF BLACK WOMEN IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In this chapter the involvement of women at organisational level in the twentieth century ending in the early 1960s, when the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) were banned, is discussed. The latter part of the chapter focuses on the FSAW as a pivotal organisation for women's involvement in politics in the 1950s. Its campaigns against the Pass Laws are particularly noteworthy. The highlighting of the FSAW is also intended to show the links between this organisation and the BWF, since many of the tenets of the FSAW were drawn on by the BWF.

#### EARLY MOBILISATION 1900-1948

The organisational inspiration for women since the start of the century has been determined largely by socio-political issues. White political domination, especially, has been a major determining factor of the issues prioritised as well as the racial composition of the different movements. In the period up to the outbreak of the Second World War, concern for community issues appear to have dominated the organisational involvement of Black women.<sup>1</sup> Classified largely as "black women's welfare organisations" some of these include the Orlando Mother's Welfare Association started in 1937, the National Council of African Women (NCAW) formed in 1937 and the association of European and African Women mooted in 1936.<sup>2</sup> Among Indian women the Durban Indian Women's Association which appears to have been formed around 1908, and the Durban Indo-European Council founded in the 1930's are two further examples.<sup>3</sup> Being largely of middle class composition,

and divided along linguistic lines in the case of Indians, these organisations focused on such issues as the provision of social services including creches, transport, self-help schemes such as sewing and cooking, and other social welfare programmes such as health committees and child welfare institutions. A notable feature of some of these organisations was the principle of joint co-operation between Whites and Blacks. Thus the Johannesburg Indo-European Women's Association (JIEWA) formed after 1928 declared as its aim the "mutual intercourse and to further a better understanding between the two communities".<sup>4</sup>

The conservative attitude adopted towards Indian women as outlined in Chapter One, restricted the association of women to cultural women's organisations reflecting the ideological underpinning of such involvement. As Chetty notes, the mobilisation of women into cultural groups was allowed by men because it "could be seen as a moving into a safe acceptable space".<sup>5</sup> Also the concerns of these organisations, such as welfare and morality, were an extension of the household, "the private sphere of the traditionally inscribed roles of women"<sup>6</sup>

The earlier emphasis on social and welfare issues, sprinkled with political issues such as the early pass campaign of 1913, was to be shifted in the 1940s. During this time the ANC's view as regards the role of women underwent a significant change. In 1943, women were accorded full membership status within the ANC, allowing for the establishment of the ANC Women's League (ANCWL).<sup>7</sup>

The importance of the support of women was also reflected in the concerns of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). Focussing mostly on working class women of different colour groups, it emphasised the role of women in the national liberation struggle. This is reflected by the election of 2 women to the 15 member central committee in 1945.<sup>8</sup>

Like the ANC, however, concern for women was in the context of national liberation not gender discrimination, but unlike the ANC, the CPSA showed a greater willingness to get involved in local issues.<sup>9</sup> That is to say that while the ANC focused on issues pertaining to national liberation, the CPSA was concerned largely with working class, labour, 'bread and butter issues' such as wages, transport and passes.

While the CPSA accorded women recognition for their leadership, it was in the trade unions that women were given greater political recognition in South Africa.<sup>10</sup> In the 1940s black trade unions operated in the context of growing secondary industries. The number of African women in industry in particular, was beginning to increase, promoting the potential for female involvement. Two organisations with which these black women became involved were the Garment Workers Union and the Food and Canning Workers Union.<sup>11</sup>

Then in 1948 came the Nationalist Party victory, marking the advent of apartheid. Generally considered as a turning point in the history of South Africa, this period has had dramatic impact on the national liberation struggle and the mobilisation of women.

#### 1948-1960 With Particular Reference to the FSAW

The exodus of African women to urban areas discussed in Chapter One only drew concerted reaction from the government in the 1950s when the government attempted to extend passes to them for the first time.<sup>12</sup>

This instrument of control has produced a long history of opposition culminating in the intensified campaigns against it in the 1950s. The history of the struggle of African women against passes has been well documented.<sup>13</sup> Its effects on the mobilisation of women

under the banner of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) had implications for later black women's resistance movements, as many of the tenets of the FSAW were revived and emphasised by the Black Women's Federation in 1975.

In this respect the 'Women's Charter' adopted by the FSAW at its inaugural meeting in 1954 was of fundamental importance. Two issues raised by this document are worthy of mention, as they had direct bearing on the principles adopted by the BWF. The first is that the Charter affirmed the empathetic identification of women with men as part of the struggle for national liberation. The second is its commitment to the removal of disabilities that discriminate against women on the grounds of their sex.<sup>14</sup> This shows clearly the two-pronged nature of Black women's struggles in both the 1950s and 1970s: national liberation and gender equality. It was the former issue however that always took precedence over the latter. Both the FSAW and BWF saw themselves primarily as bodies integral to the movement for national liberation.

Along with the Women's Charter, the manner of organisation of the FSAW in general served as a great inspiration for the BWF. Winnie Mandela, member of the Transvaal Regional Branch of the BWF, speaking on the occasion of its regional meeting in 1976 shows clearly this 'continuity' in the aims of the two organisations when she said:

Comparing the two constitutions, I find they have the same objects except that the 1975 one allows a Black membership only and it is based on the legislation governing Blacks today<sup>15</sup>

This also highlights the important difference between the organisations on membership affiliation. The FSAW was multi-racial while the BWF, taking the Black Consciousness stand, was open to Black membership only.

Opposition politics in the 1950s, began "with a commitment to militant African nationalism, mass action and to the tactics of boycott, strike and civil disobedience".<sup>16</sup> Defiance became the guiding principle of the ANC's 'Programme of Action'.<sup>17</sup> This resulted in the Defiance Campaign of 1952, based on the Gandhian model of civil disobedience and passive resistance. It was embarked upon by the Congress Alliance "with the aim of securing the repeal of all legislation considered to be discriminatory".<sup>18</sup> By the time the campaign ended, abruptly in December, having been launched in June of the same year, 8577 passive resistance volunteers had been arrested, including a number of women.<sup>19</sup> This was indicative of the tough stand the government was prepared to take against these dissidents.

The government strengthened its position by applying a series of laws designed to suppress this opposition. These included the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 and the Public Safety Act of 1953.<sup>20</sup> It was in this context that the state attempted to regulate the flow of African women to the urban areas by the extension of passes to them.

The FSAW accordingly launched its anti-pass campaigns. Passes for women were ushered in by the introduction of the Natives Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act of 1952. This law made it obligatory for all black men and women to carry passes, triggering a series of protests against it.

Of all the campaigns the most spectacular of these was organised on 9 August 1956, when some 20 000 women came to the Union Buildings in Pretoria with petitions containing over 100 000 signatures.<sup>21</sup> Indeed it affirmed the FSAW, with its majority support from the ANCWL, as the most powerful women's organisation of its time. That 9 August was declared Women's Day in South Africa was testimony to the monumental impact of that day.

While anti-pass campaigns rank amongst the most important activities of the FSAW, there were other significant areas of intervention. These were campaigns against the Group Areas Act of 1950 and the Bantu Education Act of 1953 which "held a particular appeal for women, since they related directly to their homes and their children".<sup>22</sup> Held under the auspices of the ANC and the Congress Alliance, rejection of the Bantu Education Act was evoked when the Minister of Native Affairs Dr. H.F. Verwoerd imposed on Africans a system of education designed to restrict them to the confines of menial labour, relegating them to a position of perpetual subjugation. However the boycott of classes called for by the ANC in the late 1950s supported by both the Congress Alliance and the FSAW was largely a failure.

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The emphasis on the effects of the Bantu Education Act was to become a major issue in oppositional politics in the period of Black Consciousness, and the highlighting of Black education by the BWF and the BCM in general, is discussed in later chapters.

### THE BANNINGS

In 1959 the state's devices of restriction were being earnestly applied, with Security Branch activities on the increase. In addition to the external disruptions of state repression the liberation struggle also underwent its own turbulence. In December 1959 the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), broke away from the ANC. Tracing its roots to the period when Anton Lembede's views of African nationalism in the 1940s predominated, this group refused to sacrifice the Africanist identity of the liberation struggle. The multiracial approach of the ANC was opposed by "the Africanist aim of psychologically rejuvenating the nation's blacks by having them act alone in reclaiming South Africa from white



domination".<sup>23</sup> The PAC organised Africans only, refusing to consider any other racial group as part of the struggle. For supporters of the PAC, both the Congress Alliance and the Freedom Charter that emerged from initiatives in 1955 displayed the manipulative control whites exerted over African struggles.<sup>24</sup> It was in the circumstance of the ANC's pre-occupation "with a civil war over its own ideological future rather than any mass apartheid campaigns", that the initiative in mass opposition to the government in the period 1957 and 1958 was taken by women under the auspices of the FSAW.<sup>25</sup>

With a renewed Africanist spirit, the PAC led by Robert Sobukwe, pre-empting an ANC campaign, prepared for its massive national high point, when it launched the pass campaign for 21 March 1960. The Sharpeville massacre followed, and shortly after it came further state backlash. Verwoerd issued a decree banning both the PAC and ANC.

This was followed by the declaration of a state of emergency and massive state arrests under the new restrictive law, The Unlawful Organisations Act of April 1960. Under these circumstances the demise of the FSAW was imminent. Its campaign against passes was eventually broken with the introduction in October 1962 of Proclamation 268 and Government Notice 1722 of 26 October 1962 making it obligatory for African women to carry passes as of 1 February 1963.<sup>26</sup>

Under the state's policy of repression, spearheaded by bannings, the leadership of the FSAW was reduced. The earlier banning in the 1950s of its first Secretary Ray Alexander, was now coupled with the banning of its President Lilian Ngoyi and Secretary, Helen Joseph in 1962.<sup>27</sup> By 1975 the names of 290 women categorised as "imprisoned, detained, banned, house arrested or banished for their opposition to Apartheid" were listed by Hilda Bernstein.<sup>28</sup> In these circumstances the FSAW ceased to be effective, although it was never dissolved, or banned as the ANC and PAC were.

The ideology of Africanism was not to wither away and its appeal against multi-racial organisational involvement found support in the period of the 1970s, when Black Consciousness adopted this principle against white racial exclusivity. The aims of the FSAW too were not lost. In December 1975 in Durban the Black Women's Federation was formed, declaring its aims similar to that of the FSAW and working within the parameters of both the Women's Charter and Black Consciousness.

The scale of action among women evident in the 1950s was not to repeat itself in the 1970s, yet the actions of women in this later period were largely inspired by the earlier campaigns. What emerged then in the 1970s, in the BWF was a synthesis of the influences of multi-racial female co-operation in the 1950s with the tenets of BC espoused in the 1970s. The product of this synthesis was the creation of an exclusive Black women's organisation that proposed to advance the cause of Black unity against apartheid in the main. All other issues relevant to their position as women were subordinated to these objectives. It is to the political context of Black Consciousness and the 1970s in which the BWF was formed, that I now turn.

#### Footnotes:

1. The context of the discussion on the mobilization of women, apart from the specific involvement of women in socio-economic issues, is political with specific reference to national politics.
2. J.C. Wells, 'The History of Black Women's Struggle Against Pass Laws in South Africa 1900-1960', Columbia University: 1982. pp.275-277
3. See U.S. Mesthrie: 'From Rose Day Shows to Social Welfare: White and Indian Women in Joint Co-operation in the 1930's. Paper Presented at the Conference on Women and Gender in Southern Africa, University Natal, 1991. pp.9,10
4. Minutes of Meeting of JIEWA 25.1.1933 as quoted in Mesthrie,

- op. cit. p. 12
5. Chetty, op. cit. p.5
  6. Ibid. p.5
  7. C.Walker, Women and Resistance in South Africa, London:Onyx Press, 1982. p.89
  8. Ibid. p. 98
  9. IBID. p.49. p.55
  - 10 R.E. Lapchick and S. Urdang, Oppression and Resistance:The Struggle for Women in Southern Africa, USA: Greenwood Press, 1982. p.121
  11. C.Walker: op cit. p.117-121
  12. This does not suggest that the exodus of African women began in the 1930's. Walker(ed), op. cit. p. 180 for example cites the movement of Pedi women as early as the 1840's and 1850's.
  13. Walker, op.cit., analyses this in detail.
  14. Walker, Women and Resistance, op. cit. p.156
  15. The World, 13.5.1976
  16. T. Karis and G.M. Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa. 1882-1964. Vol 2. 1935-1952. California: Hoover Institute Press, 1973. p.403
  17. Introduced in 1949 "The "Programme" proposed that a council of action, work for the boycott and abolition of "all differential political institutions" and "employ the following weapons: immediate and active boycott, strike, civil disobedience, non-co-operation and such other means as may bring about the accomplishment of our aspirations". (As quoted in Karis et al op. cit. p.104)
  18. M. Horrell, A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1953-1954, Jhb: SAIRR, 1954. p.3; The multi-racial Congress Alliance formed in the 1950's consisting of the ANC, the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the South African Coloured People's Congress (SACPC) and the South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD), was a body set up to co-ordinate opposition to white supremacy in South Africa.
  19. P. Walshe, The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, Cape Town: A.D.Donker Pub, 1987. p.402
  20. The Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 empowered "the Minister to impose severe restrictions by means of a banning order on the freedom of movement, speech and association of any person whose activities he deemed to be furthering the achievements of the objects of communism". E. Hellman and H. Lever(eds), Conflict and Progress. Fifty Years of Race Relations in South Africa, Jhb: Macmillan, 1979. p.88 By 1974 1280 people had been banned this way. Ibid. p.95.
  21. Walker, op. cit. p. 195
  22. Ibid. p.175.
  23. S.M. Davis, Apartheid Rebels. Inside South Africa's Hidden War, New York: Yale University Press, 1987. p.11.
  24. T. Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945, London: Longman, 1983. p.83
  25. Davis, op. cit. p. 11
  26. Lapchick et al, op. cit. p. 147

27. Helen Joseph became the first person to be placed under "house arrest", a new law passed in 1962. Ibid p.147
28. H. Bernstein, For their Triumphs and their Tears. Women in Apartheid South Africa, Britain: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1975. pp.69-71

### CHAPTER THREE

#### BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

##### EMERGENCE OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

In this chapter I discuss briefly the emergence of the Black Consciousness (BC) ideology, the establishment of the South African Students Organisation (SASO) and the Black People's Convention (BPC) and the mobilisation of organisations broadly referred to as the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). The Chapter ends with a discussion on the influences of this political tradition on the uprisings in 1976, viewed as a vindication of Black Consciousness.

Before attempting a definition of BC, it is necessary to discuss the historical roots or inspiration for this tradition. The influences on BC have come from several sources. Not in order of priority, these may be divided into two broad categories: firstly, Black American writings as well as the Civil Rights Campaigns in the US in the 1960s; secondly the influences of orthodox African nationalism as espoused by Anton Lembede, in the main, in the 1940s.

Lembede's observation of the determination with which white (Afrikaner) dominance was propagated after Union (1910), inspired him to propound a philosophy of African nationalism that would combat the forces of white paternalism. He thus concluded that what Africans needed was a new and aggressive self-image where pride in their past and

focus on their future emancipation, would be fused to liberate Africans from their subjection to white hegemony and psychological inferiority. From this sense of psychological re-education would arise, as Lembede impressed upon Africans in his writings, the necessity for self-reliance which could "realize itself through and be interpreted by, Africans only".<sup>1</sup>

This psychology of self-reliance inspired a policy of self- help, where through community-initiated projects, Africans were taught self-sufficiency. These programmes became the hallmark of women's contributions to the socio-economic development in the 1940s and 1950s in both rural and urban areas. This tradition revived in the 1970s served to rope in the ordinary women as participants in community projects run by BC operatives, such as health care and literacy projects, as well as members of self-help groups like Zenzele, Parent Teacher Associations and YWCA.<sup>2</sup>

The belief in the African spirit and the importance of that spirituality to the liberation of Africans appeared however, too idealistic for the generation in which it was propounded. Hence its relative dormancy as a political principle until the formation of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1959, when an attempt to re-emphasize the centrality of Africanism to the liberation movement. This strategy was in direct opposition to the dominant tradition established by the Congress Alliance in the 1950s, which marked a period of multi-racial co-operation as discussed in Chapter Two. It was against this backdrop that the Black Consciousness ideology manifested itself in the 1960s.

Three major issues relate to the rise of BC in the 1970s. They are, the establishment of 'grand apartheid' with particular reference to the Bantu homelands, mounting state repression, and Bantu education as set up by the Bantu Education Act of 1953. Each of these and their influence on BC will be discussed.

H.F. Verwoerd, "the principal maker of the apartheid state", came to power in 1958.<sup>3</sup> At this point, legislation fundamental to the establishment of the segregationist state had already been set in motion. These included the Group Areas Act (1950), Separate Amenities Act (1953), Bantu Education Act (1953) and the Immorality Act (1957). Completing this edifice, was Verwoerd's introduction of the policy of Separate Development, which paved the way for ten ethnic homelands. Transkei under the leadership of Kaiser Matanzima was the first to be accorded the status of 'independence' as early as 1963, made possible by the Bantu Authorities Act of 1959. Following in its footsteps and facilitated by the Bantu Homelands Constitution Act of 1971 came Bophuthatswana in 1972. In setting up these homelands as separate political units, claiming to be preserving the ethnic individuality of the respective Black groups, little if any thought went into the upliftment of these rural areas as recommended by the Tomlinson Commission (1955), and no additional land outside of the thirteen per cent stipulated by the 1936 Natives Land Act was released. The government's ulterior motives of removing the threat of urban blacks, the wider separation of Black races and preservation of the exclusivity of white South Africa while giving Blacks a semblance of nationhood, took precedence over socio-economic realities such as African urbanisation and rural and urban poverty.

To guard against homeland opposition as well as general Black hostility to apartheid, Vorster's machinery of state security, called the Bureau of State Security (BOSS) was set up. This repressive body headed by Hendrick van den Bergh, "had been relentless in stamping out Black opposition".<sup>4</sup>

Equally daunting to opponents of apartheid was the barrage of laws in the post-banning period of the 1960s. Some of these laws included the 1963 Bantu Laws Amendment Act which tightened influx control, the Criminal Procedure Amendment Act of 1965 which provided for 180 days detention without charge or trial, the 1967 Terrorism Act which created the crime of terrorism with a minimum of five years in prison and the Prohibition of Political Interference Act which prohibited multiracial political parties and meetings.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, fundamental to the emergence of BC was the state's policy on African education. Until 1955 the responsibility for the education of all race groups rested with the provinces. In that year the control of African education was brought under the control of the Minister of Native Affairs, Dr. Verwoerd, who, apart from curtailing state expenditure for African education, tailored a new educational policy designed to undermine the educational competence of Africans so that they would be confined to the domains of menial and manual labour.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to position this ideological imperative of Bantu education in the context of the politics of the 1970s. Between 1972 and 1976 the government attempted to restructure urban secondary and high school education in an attempt to meet new (increased) demands for diverse skilled labour which had started to soar in the late 1960s. Industry pressured the state to expand educational opportunities for Africans to meet the especially high need for clerical, sales, industry and personell workers.<sup>7</sup>

The result of the above expansion was the availability of secondary education to the masses, in contrast to the period from about 1956 to the late 1960s when Bantu education generally discouraged the development of skilled African personnel.



In the 1970s:

African people began to look upon education as offering the most important chance, perhaps the only one, of escaping the ever widening circle of poverty into which so many were trapped.<sup>8</sup>

More important this increased participation in Bantu Education indicates its centrality as a site of resistance. Africans were now prepared to use the system to acquire skills to be able to hold their own to achieve what BC described as psychological self-sufficiency. So despite the ideological underpinnings, the system could be used to their advantage by their completion of studies. This voluntary support of Bantu education by Africans was indeed significant especially if one examines the figures of enrolment. Since the inception of the policy of Bantu education, African school enrolment grew from 1.0 million in 1955 to 3.7 million in 1975. During the same period, despite the high drop out rate at primary school level, the number of secondary school pupils rose more than ninefold from 34.983 to 318.568.<sup>9</sup>

The ideological aims of separation and subjugation implemented in schools were carried into tertiary education by the introduction of the Extension of University Act in 1959. This Act forbade the admission of Blacks to universities other than those created for their own ethnic groups. To this end, several new university colleges were established. Significant among them in the rise and spread of BC was the University College of the North (Turfloop) in the Transvaal for Africans from a specified geographic location, the University of Durban Westville for Indians and the University of the Western Cape for Coloureds. The University of Natal's Medical School however ranks supreme among these as it was the most important centre for the development of Black Consciousness.

## THE SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENT'S ORGANISATION

Conscious of the fate of student organisations loyal to the ANC and PAC in the past, BC sought to carve an identity that would involve an effective political strategy for Black liberation without transgressing the apartheid constraints that would lead to its banning. It was with this desire to keep the organisation legal yet effective that the policy enunciated by BC for awareness of the Black plight in South Africa, began.

At the helm of Black Consciousness was Steve Biko. Despite his constant emphasis on the message rather than the man ("we must attempt to get people to identify with the central core of what is being said rather than with individuals"), the movement could not escape the indelible mark of Steve Biko.<sup>10</sup> The history of resistance politics of 1970s is synonymous with BC and the life and challenges of its author.

Born in King Williamstown in 1946, Biko was exposed to liberalism early in life. Having attended a liberal Catholic boarding school in Marianhill he recognised the constraints of education where 'thought control was the norm', an obvious attack on the Bantu Education Act of 1953 in South Africa.<sup>11</sup> His entry to the Black medical school at the University of Natal in 1966 gave him the platform from which he could attack the liberal stand of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). While many university authorities forbade the association of Blacks with such liberal student organisations as NUSAS, the University of Natal was an exception. NUSAS was a white student body committed to the liberal tradition of opposition to racial discrimination. The empathetic identification of NUSAS with the position of Blacks in South Africa earned it the support of many Black students. Biko's association with NUSAS marked his entry into student politics.

At the annual congress of NUSAS at Rhodes University in July 1968, Biko experienced "the artificial integration of student politics" when Black students were accommodated separately.<sup>12</sup> This led him to question the viability of liberal politics as an effective mechanism for change. As a result these Black delegates withdrew from the Congress, joined the multiracial University Christian Movement (UCM) at Stutterheim nearby, where the seeds of an all Black movement were sown.

In July 1969 the South African Students Organisation (SASO) was formally launched at the University of the North (Turfloop) with Steve Biko as president along with his lieutenants Barney Pityana, Harry Nengwekhulu, Hendrick Musi, Petrus Machaka, Manana Kgware, Aubrey Makoape, J. Goolam and Strini Moodley.<sup>13</sup> No women were elected onto the first executive of SASO, making clear the gender bias of the organisation.

In justifying its identity as an exclusive Black organisation SASO attacked the liberal position of NUSAS. SASO and BC were likewise attacked for being 'separatist' and 'racist' as well as for their attack on the general liberal standpoint in South Africa's opposition politics. Alan Paton regretted the attack on the White liberals, citing SASO as being a major stumbling block in the way of liberation, and described their attack on the liberals as "fire against the politically unarmed".<sup>14</sup> Implying that the state's backlash would be devastating in the event of SASO's criticism of it, Paton accused them of misdirected criticism. Notwithstanding this, SASO's appeal to Black students was instant, as was its refreshing approach, its focus on the constructive abilities of united and concerted action by Blacks for Blacks. Part of the enthusiasm with which this organisation was greeted can be accounted for by the absence of any organised Black student body on university campuses in this period.

What was Black Consciousness? BC can be described "as pragmatic Africanism".<sup>15</sup> Biko expands:

He is first of all oppressed by an external world through institutionalized machinery and through laws that restrict him from doing certain things, through heavy work conditions, through poor pay, through difficult living conditions, through poor education, these are all external to him. Secondly, and this we regard as the most important, the Black man in himself has developed a certain state of alienation, he rejects himself precisely because he attaches the meaning White to all that is good, in other words he equates good with White. This arises out of his living and it arises out of his development from childhood.<sup>16</sup>

This quotation emphasizes certain significant aspects of the movements' thinking. It gives clearer insight into its choice of identification as exclusively Black. It points to the organisation's perception of the root of oppression by referring to the laws of apartheid from which the psychological 'state of alienation' arose. It also suggests the constraints of working at White organisational level as this does not alleviate the psychological association of Blacks with inferiority. Since this takes place from childhood, the deeply ingrained nature of this inequality needs to be urgently addressed outside the parameters of "institutionalised machinery".<sup>17</sup> In this regard it is interesting to note that Biko's politicization first came through observing the exploitation to which his mother was subject as a domestic worker.<sup>18</sup>

## BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND GENDER RELATIONS

Equally important, Biko's words highlight the thinking of members of SASO on gender relations. His political language and rhetoric clearly confirm the sexist nature of the principles of BC. Biko's frequent use of "he", and "the Black man" in the above quotation, are indicative of this. Speaking on 'White Racism and Black Consciousness', Biko's references to "men", "inhumanity to the Black man", "the Black man's struggle" and "We Coloured men", all affirm the primary role of men in the political struggle for liberation.<sup>19</sup>

In their relationships with fellow women students BC exponents showed themselves to be afflicted with the common gender stereotypes held of women in general. The strongly patriarchal nature of SASO was evident in many of its activities towards its women associates. Examples such as the responsibility for catering and cleaning at SASO functions always fell on women in a clearly gender dichotomised fashion.<sup>20</sup>

Black women too, although recognising the positive spin-off of BC by its assertion of the pride of being Black, and the political consciousness they enjoyed from their activism, confirmed the gender limitations of their association with SASO.

The sexist nature of SASO was evident from the way women within its ranks had to "evolve survival strategies in the male dominated political sphere".<sup>21</sup> This need arose from the lack of acknowledgement of women as political equals. For the most part women were sidelined on public platforms and debates. Even when they asserted their individuality as female political beings, "they were treated as, and accepted the role of, honorary men".<sup>22</sup> Mamphela Ramphele, a BC activist and intimate associate of Steve Biko asserts:

We had after all, entered the domain, generally regarded as the preserve of men and were treated accordingly. We also saw ourselves as exceptions to the rule governing conventional gender relationships.<sup>23</sup>

Notwithstanding the challenges to sexism by a few women activists at a public, political level, the 'private' remained largely unchallenged "with the man as the dominant partner".<sup>24</sup> Even when men abdicated their responsibility to share duties associated with domestic work, the sexist practices and divisions of labour along lines of gender were never challenged by women associated with SASO.<sup>25</sup>

It is in the light of the assertiveness of a few women in SASO and BC affiliates that the leadership ability of women must be seen. Vuyelwa Mashalaba, founder member of the BWF, for example, appears to have been the only woman ever elected to a SASO national executive committee.<sup>26</sup> Given the marginalisation of women from direct political involvement in SASO, association with community programmes allowed for their leadership talents to be recognised. Among the eminent women leaders were Dr. Mamphela Ramphele, who ran a Black Consciousness self-help clinic in King Williamstown, and Thenjie Mtintso, a journalist. The Black People's Convention (BPC) elected a woman, Winnifred Kgwere, as its first president. Other prominent women were Thoko Mpumlwana, the former editor of the BCM programme publication, 'Black Review' and Mikiwe Deborah Matshoba former literary director of SASO.<sup>27</sup>

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BLACK PEOPLE'S CONVENTION AND THE IMPACT OF THE EXPORT OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS TO THE COMMUNITY

It was the formation of the Black People's Convention (BPC) in March 1973, referred to as the adult wing of SASO, which became the agency which attempted to carry BC to the masses. It was in here that the role of women was most prominent since it was an organ for the co-ordination of community projects which identified the role of women. The formation of the BPC marked an evolution in the development of the BCM which now became a "meaningful and directional opposition" force committed to firm action.<sup>28</sup> Based on an association of organisations each with the task of becoming involved in "scrupulously law-abiding education and community action campaigns" the BPC sought to build the "psychology of self-reliance" of Blacks.<sup>29</sup> It was in this light that the formation and activities of the BWF must be seen.

The diversity of organisations inspired by the SASO/BPC alliance was hardly likely to lead to a confinement of activities to consciousness raising. In 1975, for example, colonialism had ended in the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola. This was preceded by the fall of the Portuguese government in a coup. The BPC and SASO rose to the occasion by organising pro-Frelimo rallies which were immediately banned by the authorities. The detention of several SASO executive members followed.

However the seeds of the Soweto uprising had been sown and the lessons of BC had begun to manifest in dramatic affirmative action. The state's attempt to enforce Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in Black schools led pupils to call a rally in Soweto on 16 June 1976 with the support of the Black Parents Association.<sup>30</sup> Sparked by the killing of an eleven year old child this demonstration against "the language of the oppressor" was quick to

spread nationwide, and the leadership of the Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC) as well as the other Black pupils' student bodies country wide were at the forefront.<sup>31</sup> The response of the government against this spontaneous yet overwhelming uprising was brutal. Having started among the intelligentsia, the base of activity of the BCM expanded itself downward to the pupil community to whom mass education had become more accessible, ironically through the Bantu Education Act.

That the Soweto uprisings were indeed a turning point in the history of resistance in South Africa is without doubt. No protest event since the Sharpeville shootings had such wide national and international repercussions. Its participants saw it as "a rebellion, revolt and mass protest".<sup>32</sup> The Weekend World (later banned), writing a year later of the effects of the Soweto uprisings, stated, "The hearts and minds of the Soweto people have undergone a revolutionary change and it is difficult to see them reverting to their former ways." <sup>33</sup> Indeed argues Fatima Meer "Overnight the children became the defenders of their people against their government".<sup>34</sup>

While the events of Soweto have been well documented, a brief discussion of the wider effects of the uprising does reflect on the pervasiveness of BC and its far reaching effects. Tom Lodge, for example, argues that the events were influential in initiating a 'direct' phase of resistance to apartheid.<sup>35</sup> Herman Giliomee saw the events as having caused a split in South African politics between those who support a negotiated settlement and those who saw forceful change as the only way to political change.<sup>36</sup> R.W.Johnson, writing as early as 1977, perceptively predicted that the unrest would lead to a 'new assertiveness' among Blacks implying greater force and strength in direction.<sup>37</sup> On the international front 1976 had far reaching economic repercussions. Foreign investments and foreign outlets for South African goods were removed or constricted, while on the political front South Africa



was labelled a pariah state, with the United Nations bringing greater pressure to bear on South Africa for both her apartheid policies and her continued occupation of Namibia. "In short" writes J.D. Brewer "the opposition shown in 1976 and since has been legitimated by being shown to be effective".<sup>38</sup> While these points of view reflect on the effects of BC on the uprisings of 1976 and on the general political consciousness among Blacks, it has been argued that these effects were ideological rather than organisational.<sup>39</sup> That is to say that the BCM acted as a catalyst not a co-ordinator of events in 1976. This view would appear to be consistent with the organisation's operation as an agency of consciousness.

Then on 12 September 1977 came the death in detention of Steve Biko. On the 18 August 1977 Biko was arrested for transgressing his banning orders. His death revealed the stark brutality to which he was subjected. Despite overwhelming evidence in this regard no individual from the security forces was brought to book, resulting in a heavy indictment on the State by both the local and international world.

But the State persisted with suppressing 'subversion'. On 19 October 1977 all BC-associated and BC-influenced organizations were banned. In addition to every single BC organisation mentioned in the above text, the bannings included the Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of Africans (ASSECA) formed in 1969, the Black Community Programmes, a self-help body which became autonomous in March 1973, the Zimele Trust Fund which aided political prisoners and their families, the Medupe Black Writers' Union formed early in 1976 and the Black Women's Federation.

Thus the implications of SASO's adoption of BC as an ideology of liberation were far reaching in practice. The organisation and its affiliates had the difficult and somewhat insurmountable task of being effective yet remaining legal. To the latter end the state's

increased 'onslaught' against apartheid dissidents finally triumphed. It was in these politically trying circumstances then and the peak of both Black Consciousness and state surveillance that the Black Women's Federation, attempted to carve itself a niche in the annals of resistance politics. It is to the formation and activities of the BWF that I now turn.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE BLACK WOMEN'S FEDERATION

The Black Women's Federation (BWF), an organisation of Black women, was formed under the banner of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), significantly in the year declared by the United Nations to start the 'Decade of the Women'. The BWF saw its formation as a "response to the urgently expressed need for women to form a united front".<sup>1</sup> This 'united front' of Black women against apartheid injustices took the form of a system of support, self-help and consciousness- raising. These strategies for mobilisation had already been in force by BC-initiated community programmes in different parts of the country, as part of the promotion of the psychological emancipation of Black people in South Africa.

In this chapter I discuss the events leading to the formation of the BWF. The inaugural conference, a major event in the history of the organisation, is also analysed. Finally, the principles around which it mobilised are examined, with particular emphasis on those common to the political mobilisation of Black women generally.

### BACKGROUND TO THE BWF

The initiative and impetus for the formation of a nationally representative women's organisation came largely from a group of Natal women, who under the leadership of the anti- apartheid activist Fatima Meer, formed the Natal Federation of Black Women in 1973. Thus the imprint of Fatima Meer on the BWF was apparent from the very beginning.

Fatima Meer's fight against racial injustices goes back to the 1940s when during the Passive Resistance Campaign in 1946 she was party to initiating "a new phase of political activism among Indian women within the SAIC (South African Indian Congress)".<sup>2</sup> In the 1950s her anti-apartheid involvement resulted in her election to the executive committee of the FSAW in 1954 as a Durban regional representative.<sup>3</sup> With the rise of Black Consciousness in the 1970s Fatima Meer's close involvement against racial injustices was renewed. Having attended and addressed many meetings on anti-apartheid platforms locally, she was also a recognised figure internationally where she was often invited to share both her expertise as a Professor of Sociology as well as her knowledge of the Black experience in apartheid South Africa. Viewed as a subversive by the state she was 'honoured' by several banning orders and detained for transgressing these on many occasions. Shortly after a visit to the USA in 1973, she piloted the formation of the Natal Federation of Black Women which was to spearhead the formation of the BWF two years later.

The formation of the Natal Federation was significantly influenced by two factors. Firstly the President, Fatima Meer, had just returned from the United States where she had been encouraged to review the position of Black women's organisations.<sup>4</sup> Secondly the tenets of Black Consciousness, which had by this time (1973) inspired the formation of several organisations, prompted Natal women to form a Durban-based women's organisation. Beyond this little else is known about this organisation as there is no source material on the workings of this organisation. However it was this initial gathering of women that sparked the need to establish a national body.

A further impetus for the formation of the BWF came from the International Women's Year Natal Teach-In (IWYN) held in February 1975 at the St. Anne's Church Hall in Durban. It was after this gathering of nearly 300 women from 62 organisations, and women

of vastly varying backgrounds that the formation of a national Black women's organisation seemed possible.<sup>5</sup> An analysis of the proceedings of the IWYN Teach In, reveals that the views of Black women on their position as women under apartheid, at this gathering, constituted a coherent and separate set of demands linked to the context of the national liberation struggle. These injustices to which Black women referred, were articulated around, amongst others, the Group Areas Act and the separated and graduated systems of education for the different races, at this commemorative function.<sup>6</sup> Most of the inputs and issues touched on at the Teach-In were in many ways repeated, or expanded by the BWF when it convened at the end of that year.

A significant point of difference however was the selective emphasis on gender issues at the Teach - In and the over- shadowing of these by the focus on national liberation at the BWF conference. Delegates at the IWYN Teach-In, in addition to emphasizing the fight against racial inequalities, highlighted other areas of concern as sexism, reform of laws governing abortion and the taxation of women and equal pay.<sup>7</sup> At the end of the Teach-In however, no formal sub- committee or body emerged to implement the resolutions taken, relegating the initiatives of this body to that of consciousness-raising.

What emerges from an examination of the proceedings of the IWYN Teach-In is a clear dichotomy between feminist concerns and race issues - with a comparatively greater focus by White delegates on the former and Blacks on the latter. This is clearly borne in the following appraisal by the Teach-In on one such issue, that of the status of women:

Black women dominated this part of the proceedings. It was obvious that most of the White women present hesitated to bring up peculiarly feminist problems in deference to the overwhelming social inequalities that were troubling their Black sisters.<sup>8</sup>

The different racial priorities are also borne out by the following:

There was talk of equality in employment and larger tax concessions for working married women, but these issues were overshadowed by the magnitude of the problems facing the Black women. Inequalities in law, housing, education pre-primary and high school, recreational facilities, race relations and the circumstances surrounding getting a job were the main issues.<sup>9</sup>

Pointing to the primacy of the struggle against race discrimination, the key-note speaker Fatima Meer argued:

If South African women commemorate the year of the women simply in terms of the disabilities of women alone, they will have completely overlooked the fact that over 90% of our women suffer disabilities not simply on account of their sex but principally on account of their colour.<sup>10</sup>

She accordingly saw the role of Black women in the national liberation as fundamental:

It is over to us women to solve South Africa's urgent problems. If we truly succeed in bringing into focus discrimination against South Africa's Black women then we will have, in one single stroke, focused attention on discrimination on grounds of race and sex.<sup>11</sup>

By the latter part of the year the IWY initiatives throughout the country had come to be dichotomised between White and Black initiatives. This is clearly portrayed by the following event. An IWY conference in Grahamstown under the banner of the World

Convention of Eminent Women held at approximately the same time as the BWF inaugural conference, was attended by two key BWF delegates, Margaret Naidoo and Jane Chabaku. Evidence of there being more than a clash of times between the conferences was evident in the initial denouncement of these delegates of the BWF conference for attending the Convention of Women held at Grahamstown. Both women earned the hostility of some BWF delegates and this, despite their welcome back into the 'fold', shows the ambivalence among some Black women on racial exclusivity. Margaret Naidoo highlights this when she argued as reason for attending the conference in Grahamstown: "opportunities of communicating with the outside world" which "we have to use to the fullest".<sup>12</sup> Jane Chabaku in her defence further emphasized that by attending, the reaching of "some of the unreachables" and the sharing of a platform with Whites "on an equal footing" was achieved.<sup>13</sup>

Further differences between the conferences are evident in the resolutions passed by each. The BWF's focus on resolutions specific to the demand for civil rights and liberties for all race groups contrasts with the Grahamstown call for "a commission of inquiry into the status of all South African women with a view to the creation of equal opportunities for all women, and the removal of all unjust discriminatory practices".<sup>14</sup> The pivotal point of departure thus was the focus on race discrimination in the case of the former and sex discrimination in the latter.

By December that year the BC influences on the structural organisation of the proposed national women's organisation had been sealed. The co-operation, consultation and camaraderie that the founding delegates of the BWF, Fatima Meer, Merina Nyembezi, Virginia Gcabashe, Jeannie Noel and Zubie Seedat enjoyed in February with their White sisters as members of the IWYN Committee, gave way to Black exclusivity, away from White 'patronage'.<sup>15</sup>



### THE INAUGURAL CONFERENCE COUNTDOWN

With the initiative taken by the Natal Federation of Black Women, contact was made with the Transvaal. At the home of political activist and community leader, Sally Motlana in Soweto, moves towards the formalization of a national Black Women's organisation were made late in 1975. It was decided that a national federation would be formed in Durban at a conference around the theme on 'South Africa's Black Families'.<sup>16</sup> A steering committee comprising representatives from the Transvaal (fourteen), Natal (eleven) and the Cape (four) was allocated the task of planning, but the Conference became largely a Natal responsibility, in view of the location of the Conference.

2000 invitations were sent out via the regional representatives to Black women's organisations in the respective regions, but the number of women that finally attended showed a drop in the anticipated figures. Such problems as transport, financial constraints and domestic obligations were cited as reasons for the reduced attendance.<sup>17</sup> Eventually 210 delegates from 44 areas in South Africa were registered. Of these 106 indicated no organisational affiliation, 104 were drawn from 41 organisations, with 74 representing women's groups and 30 mixed groups. The YWCA was recorded as having the largest representation of 17 with the Umlazi Resident's Association 16 and the Natal Federation of Black Women 15. Other organisations represented included the Zenzele Women's Club, Soweto Residents Association, National Council of African Women, African Housewives League and a whole host of local black women's organisations. The Natal delegates represented the following areas: Ceza, Nqutu, Umlazi-Lamontville, Clernaville, Kwa Mashu, Merebank, Isipingo Beach, Sydenham, Overport, Clairwood, Westville,

Umgababa, Asherville, Isipingo Rail, Stanger, Sparks Estate and Wentworth.<sup>18</sup> While the urban organisational bias from the above is apparent, representation from rural areas was evident from the attendance of delegates from places such as Nqutu and Ceza.

Prominent delegates included: Winnie Mandela, apartheid opponent and wife of ANC stalwart, Nelson Mandela; Dr. Vuyelwa Mashalaba, articulate SASO activist and associate of Steve Biko; Ellen Khuzwayo, secretary of the Transvaal branch of the YWCA, member of a host of community welfare organisations, and longstanding opponent of apartheid.<sup>19</sup>; Deborah Mabiletsa, a Transvaal businesswoman and community leader, who later became acting president of the BWF; dynamic Jeannie Noel, a Durban Coloured woman activist, involved with such community issues as the fight against rent hikes by the Durban City Council; Constance Khoza, director of Inter-Church Aid in the Transvaal, and Sally Motlana, president of the African Housewives League in Soweto.

The Conference was thus an exclusively Black women event which "rejected White membership and affiliation with White organisations".<sup>20</sup> Cordiality however was extended to a few White women in attendance "as observers".<sup>21</sup> The Chairwoman of the conference Fatima Meer in offering a reason for this exclusivity said that "we want to become independent and self-reliant, so that we can then come together as complete equals and become integrated in a common society".<sup>22</sup> This was consistent with the BC tenets of building psychological self-reliance and self-confidence among Blacks themselves.

The Chairperson's remarks do, however, suggest the temporary nature of this separatist stand. So although an exclusively Black body at the point of its inception, the co-operation with other non-Black organisations was not ruled out. The limits of working within the confines of Black exclusivity appear to have been affirmed when Fatima Meer, speaking in

her personal capacity, is reported to have said "that she intended to work with the International Women's Year Natal Committee which has accomplished a good deal for women of all races during this year." <sup>23</sup>

By Saturday morning, the business of the day got under way. The Conference delegates saw as their primary task the collation of views regarding a federation. This session impacted greatly on the constitution and aims of the organisation.

Some of the more important views to emerge in this session included the struggle against laws that destroy the Black family and desire for national unity under a 'Mother Body'. At a level of consciousness, reflecting clearly the influences of BC again, the conscientizing of the Black women "to make her realize her own power in deciding her destiny and overcoming her present difficulties and bringing about harmonious and peaceful change" was emphasized.<sup>24</sup> Showing clearly the pivotal role of women in pursuit of their objectives, delegates stressed that: "Women are more suited to solve the problems confronting the family since they are more sensitive to the mental and emotional crippling of the Black child".<sup>25</sup> The pivotal role of women and the family is discussed in this chapter.

The draft Constitution arising from these inputs provoked disagreement over the question of membership affiliation.<sup>26</sup> Delegates were divided between those who wished to confine membership to organisations and those who wished to include individual membership in addition.

The issue here was reminiscent of the debate in the 1950s at the FSAW inauguration: whether a federation (organisational membership) or individual membership was the best course to take. The fear of organisational domination of the BWF was the basis of

objections to organisational membership.<sup>27</sup> In the 1950s, the FSAW's decision to opt for a federation in which the ANCWL dominated, was significant in that "the priorities and internal organisational commitments (of the ANCWL) inevitably exerted enormous influence over the new women's organisation".<sup>28</sup> To guard against this happening in the 1970s the Chairperson proposed that individual and organisational membership on a weighted system be introduced. According to this system, each organisation was entitled to 6 votes on condition that it had 25 accredited members present. Individual members were allowed one vote.<sup>29</sup> With this compromise the constitution was finally adopted.<sup>30</sup>

The newly adopted Constitution appeared to be an accurate interpretation of the aims of the delegates, enunciated throughout the deliberations, particularly the earlier session of brain-storming. The organisations name was formalised as the Federation of Black Women of South Africa. However after its formal declaration the organisation became known as the Black Women's Federation (BWF).

With the Constitution adopted, the next stage was to elect national office bearers by secret ballot. Fatima Meer was elected President (National and Natal Regional), Deborah Mabiletsa Vice President.<sup>31</sup> Virginia Gcabashe was elected Secretary and Vuyezwa Moloto and Eunice Ndebele, Treasurers: "a truly multi-racial affair" commented the Sunday Times, referring to the mixed executive representing all the provinces.<sup>32</sup>

The Conference was generally well received by the press with the occasional reference to it as "separatist" and "militant feminist"<sup>33</sup>. The Sunday Tribune referred to it as a "counter conference" to the Grahamstown conference<sup>34</sup>, while the Leader affirmed the event as a first meeting of Black women of South Africa at a national level.<sup>35</sup> More significantly, the Zulu Voice in its editorial commended the organisation for the solidarity it promoted

among Blacks. It went further to suggest that "even among themselves, Black women (African, 'Coloured' and Indian) need to conduct a serious, honest heartsearch for there are real divisions which make a mockery of Black unity".<sup>36</sup>

The criticism above raises the question of whether there was sufficient common ground for a meeting of the three racial groups represented at the Conference. Going back to the guiding principle as provided by BC, the organisation of Blacks as a collective of African, Coloured and Indian members was based on the common oppression of apartheid and their collective disempowerment. Despite their common disempowerment, there was a hierarchy of disabilities which affected the African women worst, as Chapter One has made clear. The Conference programme appeared receptive to these differences and the bias towards the position of Africans is clearly revealed in their programme of addresses in which more attention was given to the plight of Africans. Despite this, common ground especially around housing and education, was highlighted at the conference. It does appear then that the views of the Zulu Voice were not prevalent at the Conference. Evidence does suggest that the Conference was promoting common issues related to the position of Black women rather than differences between them. Its subsequent programme reflected its special concern for Africans by its emphasis on rural projects, but not to the exclusion of projects involving other Black groups. In June 1976, for example, after the devastation caused by floods to 'Tin Town', the BWF undertook several upliftment projects among the affected Indians.

With the launching of the BWF and its constitution accepted the next important area was that of the presentation of conference papers on the theme of the Black Family, which is discussed in the next section.

### CONFERENCE PAPERS AND HIGHLIGHTED THEMES

A study of the programme of papers reveals the concerns that these women identified with most strongly and that motivated their convening. Five primary areas were identified: the Black Family in the context of the Economy, Education, Land and Home, Health and Welfare, and Decision Making.

Gender discrimination was subordinate to the socio-economic and political priorities but were nevertheless a significant part of their programme of action as outlined in the "Resolutions" at the end of the Conference.<sup>37</sup> A discussion of some of the Papers serves to highlight issues central to the aims of the Federation.

#### The Black family and the economy; land and home

Deborah Mabiletsa of the Transvaal in her address on 'The Black Family in the South African Economy', saw the family as the pivotal unit of society. The family's welfare, which was reliant upon economic stability, was linked to the basic requirements of food and clothing. The dramatically disproportionate allocation of land, the Group Areas Act (1950) and the Industrial Conciliation Act (1956) had all ensured the systematic exclusion of Blacks from power, she argued.<sup>38</sup>

Fakizile Skosane, continuing on the same theme saw the problems of poverty complicated by the absence of men in rural areas due to the migratory labour system. This put an additional burden on the family which was forced to become self-sufficient on agriculturally unviable land. The absence of a coherent family, in her view, resulted in "marital infidelity, desertion, divorce and juvenile delinquency".<sup>39</sup>

A clear example of the unviability of land occupied by rural Africans was that of Nqutu in Kwazulu, an area where the BWF was subsequently able to do some meaningful work to alleviate the crisis conditions there. Agnes Montshu, a representative from Nqutu, said that the area and its people appeared doomed by a number of factors including disease, contaminated water, poverty and ignorance. Aggravating social factors included alcoholism, illegitimacy, family disorganisation, unemployment and violence. Shortages of staff in hospitals, all worsened the situation in which no children's home nor child welfare society were present. Nqutu it appeared from the address was at a point of crisis and a place the BWF was to put high on its agenda of community upliftment. The intervention of the BWF here is discussed in Chapter Five <sup>40</sup>

These papers highlight the significant concerns around which these women mobilised - that of the family and motherhood. The preamble to the BWF's constitution reads accordingly:

The need to present a united front and to redirect the status of motherhood towards the fulfilment of the Black People's social, cultural, economic and political aspirations. <sup>41</sup>

In this process, the role of women was seen as pivotal especially for the survival of the family and "for socializing the youth and the transmission of the Black Cultural Heritage" <sup>42</sup>

In essence then the BWF had organised themselves politically around the notion of motherhood. Gaitskell and Unterhalter's assessment of the significance of this notion can be said to apply to the BWF:

motherhood is stressed partly as this is seen as a common experience of women, in towns and rural areas, in wage employment or working in the informal sector.<sup>43</sup>

This was by no means a new strategy of mobilisation against oppression. Walker asserts in her assessment of the Zeerust anti-pass Campaign in 1957:

The women who defied the reference book units were not demonstrating consciously for freedom or equality; one of the strongest reasons why women were opposed to passes was that they were seen as a direct threat to the family. They related directly to the maintenance of migrant labour, as instruments of influx control - shutting women off from the larger economic opportunities of the towns and preventing them from joining their husbands who were working there. In saying no to all these things, Zeerust women were fighting for their homes and families.<sup>44</sup>

For the BWF also, motherhood was a common rallying point for disempowered women, from which they could oppose those political institutions that oppressed women and which had the subsequent effect of destroying the institution of the Black, especially African family. Motherhood was used to promote unity among Black women so that meaningful self-help could be undertaken. This was itself a form of protest against White patronage as was evident from the BWF's dissociation from White woman. This political strategy arose directly from the inspiration of BC, where separatism and Black psychological emancipation were emphasized.

A further reason for the centrality of motherhood to the BWF lay in the absence of men from households in rural areas due to their participation in the migratory labour system. As the address on 'The Family in the Rural Areas' highlighted:



Problems of poverty are complicated in the Black (African) rural areas by the absence of men - husbands, fathers and grown up sons from the home. <sup>45</sup>

But in the context of the urban setting the appeal to motherhood took on a new challenge - it was seen as a powerful force of mobilisation against apartheid and family separation. In the 1970s, as discussed in Chapter One, comparatively larger numbers of Black women were urban wage earners. In this period as well, there was an increase in the number of female headed-households.

Both these changes accorded urban women comparative independence and gave to motherhood a greater dynamism as a concept of political activism rather than one denoting passivity and subordination as it was generally understood. Motherhood in the context of the BWF was thus seen as a force for political change. It is in this light that the BWF's views on gender relations must be understood. Relations between men and women were not dichotomised as gender struggles. The traditional inequality between men and women was not in question. The issue paramount to the BWF as regards gender, was the particularly disadvantaged position of women which was conceived as a direct result of the apartheid state which relegated women to the bottom of the heap. Instead of being divisive to the struggle for national liberation, women under the banner of the BCM, identified strongly with the common oppression of men.

Gender relations within SASO as discussed in Chapter Three, which can be applied to the thinking of women in the BWF can be summed in the words of SASO activist and intimate associate of Steve Biko, M. Ramphele, when she argues that:

women's participation (in politics) was seen more in terms of the extension of their role as mothers, wives and 'significant others' of their male colleagues rather than in their capacity as individual citizens. This was in part the result of the respect women themselves had for 'tradition', which acknowledged the primary role of the man in the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal system that underpins most gender relations in South Africa <sup>46</sup>

However while the politicization of motherhood is argued, the parameters of its use must be emphasized. For the BWF and the FSAW, this took place in the context of the struggle for national liberation. The struggle against gender inequality was subsumed under the above struggle. In fact gender issues per se, and less still, feminism were not prioritized on the BWF's agenda.

### Education

It was around the issues of education and housing that African, Coloured and Indian women identified the most common ground. As regards education the inputs by Doris Pamela, Ruth Paul and Theresa Hendrikse discussing African, Indian and Coloured education respectively reveals this.

These addresses condemned the ideological aims of the state in its segregated education systems, and the gross neglect by the state, especially of the education of the African child with particular reference to the gross discrepancy in funding. Ruth Paul's address in addition made special note of gender inequalities in Indian education.

The ideological aim of subjugation to White hegemony was glaringly evident in Bantu Education. Recognising its destructive impact Doris Pamela, affirmed the ideological aims of repression:

The purpose of education in South Africa is much less to educate as it is to equip the groups for their roles in the racial hierarchy. The African people have at all times rejected Bantu education and it will never be acceptable to them. It is aimed to keep African people in a state of perpetual slavery.<sup>47</sup>

As discussed in Chapter Three these ideological imperatives had a fundamental influence on BC politics in the 1970s.

The position of Coloured education in the Cape was discussed by Theresa Hendrickse. While recognising African education as in the poorest state, she did nonetheless see the problems and issues in African education as close to that in Coloured education. Few schools, double shift classes and low state expenditure were cited as serious problem areas. The shortage of accommodation was especially blamed on Group Areas dispossessions where "buildings formerly occupied by Coloured children were now standing empty and unused".<sup>48</sup> Government expenditure ratios, teacher pupil ratios, and teacher salary ratios all graduated according to race, were cited as collectively oppressive for Blacks. Reaffirming the centrality of motherhood in the delegates' thinking, she asserted that women and especially mothers had a special role in rectifying these disabilities:

the duty of all women teachers and especially mothers to inculcate in their children a sense of human dignity, to help them discover themselves as persons and not non-persons<sup>49</sup>

Ruth Paul's address positioned Indian education as above that of African in quality and approximated it with Coloured education. While these discrepancies show again the primary concern of delegates with Black oppression, her address went further to reveal the workings of discrimination on the grounds of gender.

**TABLE OF ENROLMENT FOR BOYS AND GIRLS IN INDIAN EDUCATION: 1974**<sup>50</sup>

|            | PRIMARY | SECONDARY |
|------------|---------|-----------|
| BOYS       | 94,348  | 28,780    |
| GIRLS      | 86,051  | 21,602    |
| TOTAL      | 180,399 | 50,391    |
| DIFFERENCE | 8,297   | 7,187     |

Quoting the above figures the speaker explained the disparity in gender enrolment as a result of patriarchal resistance to the education of girls, as this 'emancipation' was seen as incongruous with their suitability for marriage.<sup>51</sup>

So, as discussed in Chapter One the position of women was inextricably linked with cultural norms and patriarchal practices among Indians and indicative of the conservative attitude adopted towards them.

The devalued status of women was reflected in the state's policy of employment in the education profession for example. In her earlier address at the IWYN Teach-In, Ruth Paul highlighted the sex discrimination in teacher's salaries with these words:

I am as qualified as a man but am not on the same grade or pay.<sup>52</sup>

In a final resolution the BWF summed up their views on Black education as

inferior in content, inadequate in funding and bad in administration<sup>53</sup>

The primary emphasis was racial rather than gender discrimination. The problems they highlighted were presumed to be rectified when:

education in South Africa (was) integrated into a common administrative and academic system affording equal opportunities to all regardless of race, colour (and) creed.<sup>54</sup>

This is again evidence that for the BWF the struggle against political inequality was paramount and to which issues related to gender were subordinate.

### Housing

The discussion on housing illustrated further the pivotal role of women in the family. As already noted in the 1950s, the special role of African women in the family was emphasized as a reason against the extension of passes to them.<sup>55</sup> The continuity of this theme in the BWF was made clear when speakers highlighted the crucial role of women in the family, and the neglect of children and domestic responsibilities, all of which warranted the special treatment of women. In this regard the position of housing was discussed by Ellen Khuzwayo, Ann Tomlinson and Margaret Naidoo. The latter two spoke of the effects of the Group Areas Act on Coloureds and Indians with particular emphasis being placed by Ann Tomlinson on squatters in the Cape.

The common issues arising from all three inputs were those of dispossession, cramped residential areas, poor or non-existent amenities in townships and the problem of squatters. In all of these issues the particularly invidious position of women was emphasized.

The title of Ellen Khuzwayo's address itself 'Soweto - The City within a City' showed the maladies created by institutionalised discrimination which were encompassed within the confines of Soweto.

Amongst the issues raised by this speaker was

The plight of the single woman with a family - a widow, a divorcee an unmarried mother (as) most pathetic of all. The women without a man to shoulder her parental responsibilities also has no right to home ownership as a matter of course.<sup>56</sup>

The factors limiting the agency of women are clearly portrayed here. The state's policy of denying single women rights and relegating them to positions of minors, bound the future of women to that of men and in the absence of the latter their rights of residence and custody of children fell away.

Given the oppression of African women, together with their legal position, a separate resolution on "Legal Disabilities of South African Black Women" was produced.

Ultimately however these issues were merged with the broader issues of national liberation, and its ability to stand out as a separate issue, or whether it was desirable to separate the issue of gender discrimination as such, is debatable.

It is interesting to note that while the BWF clearly outlines the role of women as integral to the national liberation struggle, an analysis of the first conference resolution reveals that the organisation's focus was entirely on the position of women. This then suggests issues pertaining to social, political, and economic gender inequality, patriarchal subordination, and the devaluation of 'women's work' amongst others. However an analysis of all its resolutions shows, as the preceding paragraph notes, that these issues were subordinate or subsumed into the wider political struggle for liberation. As women their special concerns are borne by their resolutions: self-help, housing, migrant labour, the legal disabilities of African women and detentions. In addition to showing the concerns of women, the resolutions affirm the primacy of motherhood and the family.<sup>57</sup>

With the Conference over, each of the federal regions (Cape, Natal and the Transvaal) returned to their respective constituencies ending one of the most important meetings of Black women in that decade.

#### Footnotes:

1. Proceedings BWF Conference, December 1975, p.3
2. Walker, Women and Resistance in South Africa, op.cit. 1982, p.155
3. Ibid. p.110
4. Proceedings BWF Conference, December 1975, p.5
5. Proceedings of the International Women's Year Natal Teach-In, Durban, February 1975, p.2
6. Proceedings of the International Women's Year Natal Teach-In, Durban, February 1975, highlights this.
7. Ibid. p.25
8. Ibid. p.12
9. Ibid. p.12
10. Address, Fatima Meer, 'Racism and Sexism', IWYN Teach-In
11. Ibid.
12. Sunday Times Extra 14.12.75
13. Ibid.

14. Daily News 9.12.75
15. The Proceedings of the IWYN Teach In clearly displays this camaraderie.
16. Black in this context refers to African, Indian and Coloured people who saw themselves as commonly oppressed by laws under the apartheid order.
17. Proceedings BWF Conference, p.6
18. Ibid. p.6
19. Star 11.12.75
20. Mr George Sithole of Umlazi, an observer and Peter Magubane, the official photographer, were the only two men recorded as being present.
21. Daily News 9.12.75
22. Star 11.12.75
23. Star 11.12.75
24. Proceedings BWF Conference, p.12
25. Ibid. p.12
26. Winnie Mandela, Joyce Seroka, Deborah Mabiletsa, Ellen Khuzwayo, Sally Motlana and Vivienne Josie constituted this Committee with Zubie Seedat as legal advisor.
27. Proceedings BWF Inaugural Conference, p.13
28. Walker, Women and Resistance in South Africa, op.cit. 1991, p.17
29. Sunday Times Extra 14.12.75; See also Appendix A:d(1)f.
30. See Appendix A for the full constitution which describes the technicalities of the weighted system used.
31. Mrs Deborah Mabiletsa beat Mrs Constance Khoza (both Transvaal delegates), to vice President's position after Mrs Winnie Mandela withdrew. (Daily News 8.12.75)
32. Preliminary Report : The Black Women's Federation:Constitution and Resolutions; Sunday Times Extra 14.12.75
33. Daily News 9.12.75
34. Sunday Tribune 30.11.75
35. Leader 5.12.75
36. Zulu Voice 13.12.75
37. See Appendix B
38. Address: Deborah Mabiletsa: 'The Family and the Economy', BWF Conference
39. Address: Fakizile Skosana: 'The Family in the Rural Areas', BWF Conference
40. Address: Agnes Monthsu: 'Nqutu: Study of a Typical Rural Society', BWF Conference
41. Preamble BWF Constitution: See Appendix A
42. Ibid.
43. D. Gaitskell and E. Unterhalter, 'Mothers of the Nation: A Comparative Analysis of Nation, Race and Motherhood in Afrikaner Nationalism and the African National Congress', In Nira-Yuval-Davis and Floyd Anthias (eds), Women-Nation-State, London: Macmillan, 1989. p.69
44. Walker (1982), op. cit. p. 208
45. Address, Fakizile Skosana, 'The Family in the Rural Areas', BWF Conference
46. M. Ramphele, op. cit. p.224



47. Address: Doris Pamela: 'African Education', BWF Conference
48. Address: T. Hendrickse: 'Coloured Education', BWF Conference
49. Ibid.
50. Address Ruth Paul 'Indian Education', BWF Conference
51. Ibid.
52. Address, Ruth Paul, IWYN Teach-In Durban 1975
53. See Resolution 3A Appendix B
54. See Resolution 3B Appendix B
55. Walker, 1982, op. cit. p. 28
56. Address: Ellen Khuzwayo: 'Soweto - City within a City', BWF Conference
57. See Appendix B Resolutions

## CHAPTER FIVE

### POST CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

This chapter deals with the activities of the BWF in the year following its launch. The issues that dominated its programme were guided by the resolutions passed at the conference in December.<sup>1</sup> For the first six months of the year they were, the focus on Nqutu, matters pertaining to education, the legal position of African women and contact with national and international women's bodies.

The activities of the BWF in Natal were outlined at the first meeting of the Executive on 17 January 1976. On this occasion, clearer plans were outlined for implementation of its objectives. Resolution 3 regarding self-help projects at Nqutu "one of the most depleted areas in the country" became a priority.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the above meeting the BWF identified through a "Homework" project facts pertaining to Nqutu. Based on this report it was resolved that self-help projects would be encouraged at Nqutu with the National Executive Committee (NEC) making financial and other contributions. A meeting for the 21 February 1976 for this purpose as well as for the need "to spread the ideas of the Federation " was set.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note that the President's association with Nqutu went back to several studies conducted prior to the formation of the BWF, by the Institute of Black Research (IBR), of which she was the head. One significant study which detailed the impoverished conditions in Nqutu was conducted by Clark and Ngobese, under the auspices of the IBR. Aptly titled Women Without Men, the book captures the rural poverty in a bantustan in

which the invidious position of women is detailed. It is clear that the President's vantage point of the IBR whose specific function was to conduct fact-finding and fact-analysis in Black communities of South Africa with a view to encouraging meaningful community action, was a crucial factor in making Nqutu a recipient of aid from the BWF.

Nqutu is an impoverished district in the Kwazulu homeland. Described "as an example of a fairly typical homeland area", Nqutu lacked many crucial resources to help sustain its population of 80 000 in the period under review.<sup>4</sup>

Nqutu is agriculturally unviable, given the poor condition of the soil and harsh land terrain.<sup>5</sup> The absence of capital investment makes modern agricultural expertise inaccessible to the rural population. Water is a scarce commodity with three dams outside the district for the sole use of the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital.<sup>6</sup> Adding to this burden is the unnaturally high ratio of women to men, the latter absent because of their participation in the migratory labour system. This "abnormally high preponderance of women" is aggravated "by an abnormally high proportion of old people and children", all of which result "in a high rural dependency rate".<sup>7</sup> The per capita income of a sample of 150 families undertaken in 1973 was R28 p.a., lower than R30 to R35 p.a. estimated for Bantustans as early as 1968.<sup>8</sup>

Projects among the people that did exist in Nqutu at this time included home industries, consisting of handicraft such as pottery, beadwork, grasswork, knitting and sewing.<sup>9</sup> Literacy programmes were held by the inter-denominational church projects. Government initiatives involved a "Betterment Scheme", which in view of its involvement with population relocation programme to establish separate residential, grazing and agricultural land, as well as the culling of cattle, was "not acceptable to the people".<sup>10</sup>

The study noted further that facilities such as shops, clinics and churches were generally a distance from the scattered homesteads of Nqutu. Schools were overcrowded, with very few children going beyond standard six, "either because they cannot afford it, or because there is no post primary school near their home".<sup>11</sup> Adding to the general problems of the area, was the establishment of a resettlement camp for victims of the state policy of forced removals of redundant farm workers, labour tenants and 'squatters' on White-owned farm land. The camp was in an area known as Nondweni, which became a focus of BWF attention.

Moved by these circumstances and the address at the inaugural conference, the BWF programme arose directly out of the exigencies of the situation. Its first achievement was the erection of ten pre-fabricated classrooms in Nondweni. Secured through the assistance of a sponsor, the classrooms were a testimony to the efforts of the BWF in rural upliftment. Arrangements for a well to be dug were also made, while the selling of crafts through the Durban office realised a sum of R1000.00.<sup>12</sup> The BWF also encouraged the formation of women's groups to promote bulk buying in association with a local shopkeeper, Mrs. Jabu Mdlalose. For agriculture a large bulk order of seeds was to be made available to people interested in growing their own vegetables. Other support systems in agricultural endeavours provided by the BWF were fencing and pest control, and since the highly toxic nature of pest poison was considered dangerous in the hands of the uninitiated, women from the local Nqutu Branch of the BWF became personally involved in spraying gardens, conducting these tasks on foot.<sup>13</sup> These then represent the early achievements of the BWF.

Other areas of intervention proposed by the BWF conference were as follows. These were a proposed national commission of Black educationists and community workshop "to work out a new blueprint for education acceptable to all South Africans".<sup>14</sup> Also it was decided

that the booklet 'You and the Law' by Zubie Seedat and Merina Nyembezi be revised in collaboration with Eunice Komane, in order to include the disabilities suffered by African women in all provinces.<sup>15</sup> Finally the Federation envisaged a plan for setting up ministries in key areas to handle specific needs of communities. The following ministries and heads were nominated:

Education: Margaret Naidoo, Doris Pamela

Health: Dr. Vuyi Moloto

Welfare: Joyce Siwane and Jeannie Noel

Housing: Ellen Khuzwayo

Civic Rights: Winnie Mandela and Zubie Seedat

Labour: Deborah Mabiltsa

Public Relations: Fatima Meer

Publications: Nomathemba Sithole and Ursula David

Religion: Sally Motlana

Community development: Constance Khoza and Nobantu Ndamse.<sup>16</sup>

However no details of the subsequent activities of this body are available and it appears likely that it was unable to commence operation in view of the bannings in July of that year. (1976)

Then on 21 March 1976 'Tin Town' in Springfield, on the banks of the Umgeni River, was flooded, where 480 Indian families lost practically everything.<sup>17</sup> Under the leadership of Fatima Meer an emergency committee was set up to arrange food, clothing and furniture. The BWF encouraged the setting up of women's committees to promote bulk buying. In addition, literacy classes were held until August when the Durban City Council found accommodation for the refugees in a Council housing scheme for Indians called Phoenix.<sup>18</sup>

At a national level the Secretary Virginia Gcabashe established contact with women in Lesotho when the Council of Women of Lesotho invited Federation members to their independence day celebrations.<sup>19</sup> The President, together with Dr. Vuyi Moloto, saw contact with women internationally as imperative so as to prevent White-dominated organisations from speaking internationally on behalf of Black women. The President reported subsequently that Princess Parachatra, vice Chairperson of the International Council of Women had visited her to discuss the work of the Federation. This meeting affirmed the support of the International Council of Women which pledged to motivate help from UNESCO in the way of scholarships. And finally inspired by a meeting with Ms Jean Hendrickse of the Cape who advised the Natal Branch (President) of a conference being held by Black women in America in 1976, the BWF proposed that a conference of Third World Women be held in 1978 with Mauritius being the possible venue.<sup>20</sup>

From the material reviewed it is evident that activities pertaining to the BWF's pledges at its inauguration were enthusiastically planned, but many of their anticipated areas of intervention were still to be implemented. However constraints such as poor financial resources were to impede the work of the organisation which relied substantially on sponsors. No financial records of the organisation were available for closer examination of its financial position, but an examination of the proceedings of the BWF conference show the support of the organisation had from local business in Durban. Financial setbacks were however not as daunting to the work of the BWF as state surveillance was.<sup>21</sup> As early as February 1976 Black Special Branch officials were alleged to have harassed potential members.<sup>22</sup> The immediate effect of this was to hamper further work of the BWF by this sheer reduction in membership turnout at meetings. In Nqutu for example, "people remained afraid to identify with the organisation".<sup>23</sup>

## THE BANNINGS

The activities of the Special Branch took place in the context of the Soweto uprisings, where surveillance of all anti-Apartheid organisations, especially those with BC leanings, was intensified. The BWF, despite its constant reference to being a community upliftment organisation, was subject to this 'routine' investigation.

The BWF had barely launched its programme of action when it became caught up in the momentous events triggered by the Soweto uprisings on 16 June 1976. By July 1976, the State's organs of suppression moved against the leadership of the BWF with the banning of the President Fatima Meer.<sup>24</sup> This was part of a country wide swoop on all apartheid dissidents. In a separate paragraph of her banning, Fatima Meer was ordered "to have nothing to do with the Federation".<sup>25</sup> The Executive Committee of the Natal Branch of the BWF issued the following statement on the banning:

We the executive of the Black Women's Federation (Natal Region), view with alarm and anger the banning of our national and regional president, Mrs. Fatima Meer and the subsequent banning of the protest meeting called by concerned citizens of Durban.

In our involvement with Mrs. Meer as President of our Federation we have never known her to advocate anything subversive. On the other hand she is a great believer in community self-help. The aims and objects of the Federation are geared to self-reliance and self-dependence. As a result there is an emphasis on community projects.

We therefore denounce the arbitrary banning of Mrs. Meer and demand that the authorities lift her banning forthwith".<sup>26</sup>

The Transvaal Branch, reeling from the shock of the casualties of the Soweto uprisings, were in no doubt about the direction the organisation should take. The vice- President, Mrs. D. Mabiletse, re-affirmed the role of the BWF as the "voice of the Black women in this country", dedicated to "fighting the violence that engulfs us as mothers".<sup>27</sup> She appealed to the organisation's members not to be demoralised, imploring them to continue working on the same issues.<sup>28</sup>

The government did not stop there. The banning was followed by the detention of the President on 20 August 1976 as followed by the detention of several executive officials: on 13 August, Winnie Mandela (BWF Transvaal) who was also prominently associated with the Black Parents Association.<sup>29</sup>, on 16 August, Jeannie Noel (Natal Branch) also involved with 'Save Our Homes Campaign' against the Durban City Council and earlier joint Secretary, and on 8 August, Mrs. Sally Motlana (Transvaal), President of the African Housewives League, Vice-President of the All Africa Conference of Churches.<sup>30</sup>

Other officials detained were Transvaal members, Jane Phakati, Vesta Smith, Joyce Seroka, again women actively involved with several other community based organisations. That all these women had as one common denominator their membership of the BWF, was evidence of the hostility that the state harboured for this organisation. Indeed stated the new President: "There is a feeling that our organisation is being attacked".<sup>31</sup>



With the leaders of the BWF banned, the ability of the BWF to pursue its objectives with a renewed sense of purpose was greatly reduced. Like the banning of the leadership of the FSAW in the 1950s and the subsequent demise of the organisation, the BWF too became inactive. However the BCM as a whole continued its criticism of the Government.

A week after the death in detention of Steve Biko, 19 October 1977, little over a year after the detention of the last BWF official, virtually all BC organisations, seventeen in all were banned. The Black Women's Federation was one of those outlawed.<sup>32</sup> This ended the efforts of the BWF as an opponent of apartheid through the BC principles of self-help and psychological emancipation. Its potential for development as an effective body against discrimination was thwarted in its formative years. The organisational talents of its leadership were likewise reduced to impotence.

#### Footnotes:

1. See Appendix B
2. Minutes Meeting, BWF, 17.1.76
3. Minutes Meeting, BWF, 17.1.76
4. L. Clark and J. Ngobese, Women Without Men, Durban; Institute for Black Research (IBR), 1975. p.18
5. Ibid. p.20
6. Ibid. p.20
7. Ibid. p.26
8. Ibid. p.55
9. Ibid. p.53
10. Ibid. p.56,57; Betterment Schemes were a government initiated scheme of upliftment which involved relocation and the introduction of more scientific methods of farming. The scheme was however a failure.
11. Ibid. p.84
12. Opened in St Andrews Street in July 1976.
13. Report, Lucille Dlamini, 'Black Women's Federation Comes to Nqutu', March 1976
14. Minutes of the first national executive meeting of the BWF, 17.1.76
15. This was published and circulated according to its co-author, Zubeida Seedat. Interview, Z. Seedat, 13.9.91

16. Minutes of Meeting, BWF, 17.1.76
17. An informal Indian settlement on the banks of the Umgeni River. The area was given the name 'Tin Town' because of the type of houses made of tin or wrought iron. The area was owned by the Durban City Council.
18. Report BWF: 'Floods in Durban and the BWF'
19. Minutes of meetings, 27.3.76
20. Report of Regional Meetings, BWF 1976
21. On being banned the BWF's accounts were 'frozen' and monies confiscated by the State. However before this happened officials of the organisation were able to withdraw a portion of it. The balance in the account according to Zubie Seedat (interview 13.9.91) was not substantial.
22. Report Lucille Dlamini: 'Black Women's Federation comes to Nqutu', 1976
23. Ibid.
24. Under Internal Security Act Section 9 (1) on 22 July 1976
25. The World, 29 July 1976
26. Daily News, July 1976
27. Again the concept of motherhood is affirmed as an organising principle
28. The World, 29 July 1976
29. The Black Parents Association played a leading role during the Soweto uprisings.
30. Star, 20.10.76
31. Ibid.
32. The full list is as follows: The Black People's Convention founded in 1971; Black Parents' Association founded after the 1976 demonstrations; SASO founded in the late 1960's; The Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC) made up of high school students which became prominent shortly before 1976; the South African Students Movement (SASM), a nationwide organisation of high school students founded in 1973; The National Youth Organisation (NAYO) formed by SASM in 1973 for cultural and educational affairs and the five regional youth organisations it loosely co-ordinated; The Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of Africans (ASSECA) formed in 1969; Black Community Programmes, a self help body that became autonomous in March 1973; The Zimele Trust Fund, which aided political prisoners and their families; The Union of Black Journalists, formed in 1973 and with a nationwide membership; The Medupa Writers' Union, formed early in 1976. G.M. Carter, Which Way is South Africa Going?, USA: Indiana University Press, 1980. pp.151,152.

## CONCLUSION

Clearly then, the BWF was stamped out before its potential was tested. And yet if its early initiatives were any indication of its ability to succeed with all its projects, then the BWF had the ability to grow into a powerful federation. Several issues pertinent to the appraisal of the organisation are evaluated here.

In so far as the mobilisation of women under the banner of the BWF is concerned it would be appropriate to comment on the middle class bias of this organisation. These women were not characteristic of most women in either their material background or their level of political consciousness. As Chapter One points out, the political consciousness of the working class is far removed from that evident among the educated elite. Evidence from the social standing and backgrounds of delegates at the BWF inauguration, would appear to support this claim. The mobilisation of women in the BWF, as was the case with the FSAW as well, suggests a certain level of political 'sophistication' among these women. This involvement of the educated elite Black women peaked in the period 1973 to 1977, when they involved themselves in both their individual capacity as well as members of community organisations.<sup>1</sup>

This then suggests several important questions regarding the mobilisation of women: To what extent do these groupings represent the mass of women and their social, economic and political concerns? Do groups such as the BWF represent a Black middle class perspective in the issues they prioritised? What efforts were made to reach grass roots women?

That the initiative for the formation of political organisations in itself come from the middle class is evidence of the absence of the masses in influencing directly the agenda of these organisations. It is the subsequent programme, that for example, the BWF initiated in promoting self-help in places as Nqutu as well as by establishing a local branch there, that extend the initiatives of the educated elite to the masses. The urban context of the mobilisation of women, did serve, inadvertently, to dichotomize rural women from urban women. While this was not overtly evident in the period under review, especially since the early work of the BWF was rural based, the state's laws such as Influx Control and the Group Areas Act would have made this dichotomy inevitable.<sup>2</sup>

The sensitivity of the BWF to these divisions was evident from the manner in which it ordered its programme of action, taking into account the need to reach out rather than to be urban based. The success of its early initiatives in Nqutu is testimony to its attempts to bridge divides, especially those imposed upon the organisation, by the existence of laws separating rural and urban people and people along the lines of race.

The next issue is that of the two-fold aims of gender liberation and political emancipation of the BWF. While these appear to be two separate issues, the manner in which the BWF approached them, shows that they embraced the belief that gender emancipation is contingent upon political liberation of Blacks.

Several writings in that period typify this thinking. Hilda Bernstein (Hilda Watts), herself a political activist and later an exile in the period under review, reveals this position when she argues:

Women's organisations have always operated within the framework of the political resistance movement, because of the women's clear understanding that the reforms they need are dependent upon a restructuring of the state itself..... With all the disabilities and devastating effects of apartheid on their lives, they have never lost sight of the fact that meaningful change for women cannot be forthcoming through reform but only through the total destruction of apartheid.<sup>3</sup>

She goes on to argue the following:

The factors that most strongly control women's lives are embedded in the apartheid system ... (hence) the majority of South African women suffer first and foremost from the effects of apartheid.<sup>4</sup>

The inextricable linking of issues related to gender as part of the liberation struggle was similarly declared by the FSAW as follows:

To build and strengthen women's sections in the national liberatory movements, the organisation of women in trade unions and through the people's varied organisation.<sup>5</sup>

The BWF in its statement of purpose also aimed:

to present a united front and to redirect the status of motherhood towards the fulfilment of the Black people's social, cultural, economic and political aspirations.<sup>6</sup>

Notwithstanding the views above, certain ambivalences appear to arise from its practical application. The BWF was a gender-specific organisation. Yet despite its exclusion of men, its aims were linked to issues that have oppressed all Blacks irrespective of gender. This approach of necessity required its co-operation with men as part of the wider struggle for liberation. This thus presents a contradiction where on the one hand male membership is rejected while on the other working with them appears fundamental. This is in part accounted for by the BWF's emphasis on the themes of motherhood and the family. These institutions were seen as the domain of women and as such its needs and objectives were best articulated through them.

The emphasis on motherhood and the family by both the FSAW and BWF are an indication of their gendered demands. As Chapter Four reveals, the involvement of women represented their pivotal roles in these institutions. Their centrality in them is exacerbated by the absence of men due to their participation in the migratory labour system. So while the feminist view of motherhood, because of its supposed endorsement of patriarchy, is considered detrimental to women's liberation, the role of motherhood was indeed not conceived as such by the BWF. Rather, the experience of Black women as mothers in the context of their legal disabilities and oppression, was viewed as a landmark of their status - it was the one institution in which their gendered interests could be affirmed and articulated, and the one experience to which women of all classes could relate.

Motherhood in essence became a political medium to oppose racial oppression, which they identified closely with their Black male counterparts. So the potential for political resistance, that the family and motherhood offered the BWF and the FSAW, can be argued

to have resulted in the idealising of these institutions upon which a future society must be based.

Another apparent contradiction which is evident from an analysis of the BWF relates to its operation under the auspices of the Black Consciousness Movement. As discussed in Chapter Three the founding body of the movement, SASO, did not recognise women as political equals. In fact, SASO can be considered a sexist organisation. As a SASO woman activist Mamphela Ramphele asserts:

There was an interesting disjuncture between the genuine comradeship one experienced within the movement, and the sexism which reared its head at many levels <sup>7</sup>

Among the ranks of SASO, women were not considered as political equals. Those women that did rise to the ranks of leadership positions in SASO did so by being labelled 'honorary men'.<sup>8</sup> Under exceptional circumstances when challenges to male privilege were made within SASO/BPC ranks this :

did not represent a systematic departure from traditional gender relationships, but only served to undermine this tradition for the benefit of those who were prepared to take risks in challenging sexism at a personal level. <sup>9</sup>

Even in the BCM in general, when leadership among women was recognised, women played roles that reflected sexual stereotyping, with few exceptions. Such examples, as discussed in Chapter Three, of women as heads of community projects, serve to justify this

claim. To this end the tradition of self-help among African women, perpetuated by the BWF, can be argued to have reinforced such stereotypes of women's roles.

This brings into question the relationship of the BWF with a relatively patriarchal Black Consciousness tradition. While no direct patriarchal control such as that which prevailed in the Congress Tradition, was evident in the BCM, this was only so because the BWF functioned comparatively independently from bodies such as SASO and BPC. Despite its latitude for an 'independent' agenda, the BWF elected to pursue a path of political resistance in which the cause of national liberation was foremost.

This focus on national liberation issues to which gender struggles were subordinate or overshadowed, had not changed since the time of the involvement of Black women in resistance in the 1950s. This study shows that the common themes around which Black women have mobilised, that of the family, motherhood and the recognition of the common oppression of all Blacks, had changed little in the passage of approximately twenty years. The gender interests that Black women identified with closely were articulated through the politicization of themes such as motherhood. No direct attack on traditional institutions of female oppression, such as the sexual division of labour, the consequent stereotyping of 'women's work', and the general marginalization of the roles of women in society, was in evidence.

The BWF's primary emphasis on the national liberation struggle provides certain lessons for assessing the current position of women and gender struggles generally. The important question of gender relations and gender oppression should not be subsumed under any other struggle if it is to achieve lasting gain for women. Given the patriarchal history of



organisations such as the ANC, Inkatha and Black Consciousness Movement, the inclusion of gender struggles as part of the national liberation struggle can not be taken for granted. The view that the oppression of women will pass on the attainment of a fully democratic state ignores the fundamental dimension of oppression as a result of gender, where the subordination of women through cultural and social practices and taboos, operates independently of apartheid. Greater focus on the disabilities of women in a united stand of women regardless of race as was the case with the FSAW in the 1950s would go a long way towards the achievement of the objectives of a women's movement focused on the rights of women.

As Horn sees it:

the national question in South Africa needs to be reformulated to ensure that the struggle becomes a gender conscious struggle for a new transformed South Africa.<sup>10</sup>

In a future non-racial democracy, exclusive racial focuses will have been replaced or reduced by the attainment of the fundamental democratic ideals of the right of all to vote and the freedom of movement. Some of these goals, such as the scrapping of the detested Influx Control laws and Group Areas Act, have already been achieved. The qualitatively dissimilar positions between races, will then give way to a common identification, in which the oppression of women as a group should emerge more clear. But until then the racially based organisational involvement of women will indeed retain its relevance, and the precedence of the national liberation struggle will always serve to reduce both the priority and desire for purely feminist based organisations among Blacks. In this regard the convening of the BWF in the 1970s was the product of the racially prejudiced political agenda under which it was conceived.

Footnotes:

1. M. Ramphele, 'The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations: A Personal View', op. cit. p.215
2. One example of how laws operated to divide members was illustrated when Indian and Coloured members of the executive of the BWF unsuccessfully sought permits to attend a meeting in Ngutu on 21.2.76 (Report, Lucille Dlamini, 'Black Women's Federation Comes To Ngutu')
3. H. Bernstein: 'Growth of the Women's Struggle'. In Sechaba. Vol. 23 No.9 1989. p. 18
4. H. Bernstein: For Their Triumphs and their Tears. Women in Apartheid South Africa. New York. IDAF. 1985 p.8
5. C. Walker: Women and Resistance in South Africa. op.cit. p.282
6. Constitution - BWF
7. M. Ramphele: 'The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations: A Personal View'. In N.B. Pityana et al (eds): Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko. op. cit. p.219
8. Ibid. p.220
9. Ibid. p.220
10. P. Horn: 'Towards the Emancipation of Women in Post-Apartheid South Africa'. Paper presented at the Conference on Women and Gender in Southern Africa, University of Natal, 1991. p.5

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## APPENDIX A

### THE CONSTITUTION

#### PREAMBLE

Whereas we the Black Women of South Africa, meeting in our capacity and as representatives of Black Women's and other organisations, having analysed and assessed the problems facing Black people in South Africa and realising:

1. That Black Women are basically responsible for the survival of their families and largely for the socialization of the youth and for the transmission of the Black Cultural Heritage.
2. The need to present a united front and to redirect the status of motherhood towards the fulfilment of the Black People's social, cultural, economic and political aspirations.
3. The urgent need to co-ordinate and consolidate the efforts and activities of Black Women and Black Women's Organisations in our country.

DO HEREBY RESOLVE TO ADOPT THIS DOCUMENT AS OUR CONSTITUTION.

#### A. NAME

The name of the organisation shall be THE FEDERATION OF BLACK WOMEN OF SOUTH AFRICA, hereinafter referred to as the FBW.

#### B. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To establish contact and unity and practical co - operation amongst Black Women and Black Women's Organisations.
2. To define common problems and to lay out priorities necessary for effective

community action.

3. To determine strategies and draw up programmes with a view to heightening the social, cultural, economic and political awareness of Black Communities and thereby establish self-reliant communities.
4. To co-ordinate and consolidate Black Women and Black Women's organisations throughout South Africa with the aims and objects similar to those of the FBW.
5. To co-operate with other Black organisations with similar aims and objects as the FBW.
6. To conscientise Black people towards a sense of self- realization.
7. To raise funds to pursue the aims and objects of the FBW.

#### C. MEMBERSHIP AND AFFILIATION

1. Membership shall be open to all Black Women and Black Women's organisations in South Africa, with aims and objects similar to the FBW.
2. Organised groups may apply directly to the FBW for affiliation.
3. 10 or more Black women in a particular locality may constitute themselves into a Branch and apply for affiliation.
4. Black Women may apply for affiliation in their individual capacities.
5. Regional Branches may be formed on a Provincial basis and apply for affiliation to the National Body.
6. The Executive Council reserves the right to accept any such application for membership or affiliation without being called upon to give reasons for such rejection.

## D. STRUCTURE

### 1. GENERAL COUNCIL

- (a) Affiliated Black Women and delegates from affiliated organisations and/or branches or members of the Executive Committee shall form the General Council.
- (b) The General Council shall be the highest policy making body of the FBW and shall meet once a year in June.
- (c) A quorum shall consist of two-thirds of the affiliated members, organisations and/or branches without voting rights at the council.
- (d) Voting shall be by show of hands unless the chairperson at her sole discretion considers otherwise.
- (e) Each affiliated member shall have one vote at conference.
- (f) Each of the accredited members of affiliated organisations or groups shall have a vote at conference through their elected delegates. The secretary of an affiliated organisation or group shall inform the secretary of the FBW of its accredited membership in the year of a particular conference not later than 30 days before conference in order to establish the voting power of that organisation or group.

This practice of weighted voting will be adhered to at all conferences unless council by a two-thirds majority decides otherwise. Each Organisation shall be entitled to 6 votes per 25 accredited members, each individual shall be entitled to 1 vote. Organisations shall be entitled to a maximum of 10 votes. The Chairperson shall have the casting vote.

## 2. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

A. Shall consist of :

- i. President
- ii. Vice-President
- iii. Secretary
- iv. Assistant Secretary
- v. Treasurer
- vi. Programme Director
- vii. 8 Additional Members (at least 3 from each province)
- B. Shall meet at least once a year and as often as circumstances allow.
- C. Shall be elected by two - thirds of the General Council annually.
- D. Two thirds of the Executive shall form a quorum.
- E. Any member absenting herself from more than 3 consecutive meetings, without adequate explanation, shall automatically relinquish her position.
- F. In the event of an emergency, the Executive Committee shall have the right to convene a Special Emergency Meeting.

## 3. PERMANENT STAFF

Shall consist of

- i. Programmes Director
- ii. Typist



- iii. Any other additional member as deemed fit by the Executive Committee subject to ratification by the General Council and the Executive Committee.

## E. POWERS AND DUTIES

### 1. THE PRESIDENT

- a. Shall represent the FBW wherever necessary.
- b. Carry out the aims and objects of the FBW.
- c. Preside at all meetings of the General Council and the Executive Committee.

### 2. VICE-PRESIDENT

Shall assist the President in the execution of her duties and deputise for her wherever necessary.

### 3. THE SECRETARY

- a. Shall keep records of all proceedings of meetings of the Executive Committee and General Council.

### 4. ASSISTANT SECRETARY

Shall assist the Secretary in the execution of her duties and deputise for her whenever necessary.

### 5. TREASURER

Shall, in conjunction with the Executive, be responsible for fund-raising, for maintaining the finances of the Federation, and for keeping the books in order.

6. THE PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

- a. Shall be the liaison between the Executive Committee and the affiliated organisations and branches of the FBW.
- b. Keep regular contact and visit all affiliated organisations and/or branches, and shall be at all times available for urgent consultation with affiliated organisations and branches.
- c. Shall conduct research into Programming, Community Development Programmes and co-ordinate the work of the various affiliated organisations and/or branches.

7. AFFILIATED BLACK WOMEN, BLACK WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS AND/OR BRANCHES.

- a. Shall in their respective localities promote the interests of FBW.
- b. Shall assist in fund raising when called upon to do so by the Executive Committee.
- c. Shall hold meetings at least once a quarter.

F. FINANCES

1. AFFILIATION FEES

Black organisations and groups shall pay the affiliation fee of R20.00 per annum.

Individual members shall pay a membership fee of R5.00 per annum.

2. STRUCTURE

- a. The FBW shall be a corporate body, capable of managing its own finances.

- b. The end of the financial year shall be on February 28.
- c. Books and/or records shall be audited annually before the Annual General Meeting.

### 3. GENERAL ASSETS

- a. A Bank Account shall be opened in the name of the Federation of Black Women of South Africa.
- b. All payments shall be made by cheque, except in the case of petty cash disbursements.
- c. The President, the Secretary and the Treasurer shall have their signatures registered with the Bank. The signature of the Treasurer and that of either the President or the Secretary shall appear on all cheques.

### G. AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

- 1. Amendments to the Constitution shall be effected by at least two thirds majority at a quorate meeting of the General Council.
- 2. Notice of a motion to amend the constitution shall be sent to the President 30 days before it is debated upon and the President shall bring such notice to the attention of the constituent for and or groups before it is debated upon.

### H. DISSOLUTION

- 1. The President acting on the instruction of the Executive recognising the need for the dissolution of the FBW shall:
  - a. convene an emergency or extraordinary general council meeting which will

vote on the matter.

- b. In the event of any assets left after dissolution, shall be empowered to distribute such assets to any Black organisation as deemed fit by the Executive Committee.

- 2. The President shall issue a press statement about the dissolution.

**APPENDIX B**

**RESOLUTIONS**

**1. THE FEDERATION OF BLACK WOMEN OF SOUTH AFRICA**

We, the Black Women of South Africa, meeting on this historic occasion agree to form the Federation of Black Women of South Africa with the objective of :

- a. realising the equality of the Black Women of South Africa with the women of the world.
- b. developing sound family life.
- c. instilling the principle that character comes before colour.
- d. attaining full and equal participation in all decision making in the country.

**2. SELF-HELP AND SELF-RELIANCE**

This conference of Black Women and Black Womens' organisations resolves that every organisation be motivated to undertake projects of self-help to meet the needs of deprived communities and to promote self-reliance and self- determination in order to facilitate social, economic and political change in South Africa.

**3. EDUCATION**

- a. We, the Black Women of South Africa, register our abhorrence of the existing system of education for Blacks which ignores the wishes and the needs of the Black people, is inferior in content, inadequate in funding and bad in administration. We instruct the incoming executive to establish a committee on education to disseminate factual

material and work out programmes for an alternative and positive system of education relevant to the needs of the people.

- b. We, the Black Women of South Africa, attending the Women's Federation Conference in Durban realising that:
  - i. whereas the Black child is not always personally responsible for not being in school or continuing his/her education and
  - ii. noting that the number of early school leavers is increasing every year, urge the Government of the Republic of South Africa to build more technical schools for the training of the Black child.
- c. We reject the whole system of separate education at all levels. We recognise it as a technique to preserve White domination and Black enslavement. We demand that education in South Africa be integrated into a common administrative and academic system affording equal opportunities to all regardless of race, colour or creed, and that it be free and compulsory up to matric. We further demand that the doors of universities be flung open to all South Africans regardless of race, and that their standards be raised to a common level.

#### 4. **HOUSING**

This conference of Black Women of South Africa rejects all laws that violate the rights of Black families to land and home on racial grounds. It rejects in particular the principle that African land rights should be restricted to homeland areas. Conference resolves that full, free and equal rights be extended to all South Africans regardless of race to purchase land and build homes wherever they choose subject only to reasonable demands of health and town planning.

**5. WAGES AND TRADE UNIONS**

- a. We, the Black Women of South Africa, present at this conference, deplore the wages paid to the Black worker, particularly the women, and urge the government to bridge this wage gap between Black and White and totally remove job reservation.
- b. We, the Black Women of South Africa, demand full rights to trade unions for Blacks.

**6. MIGRANT LABOUR**

Migrant labour destroys family life. We demand that workers be integrated into the South African economy with full, free and equal rights and to have all other economic opportunities.

**7. LEGAL DISABILITIES OF SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK WOMEN**

- a. This conference instructs the incoming executive of the Federation to explain in simple terms through appropriate publications the legal disabilities suffered by the African women and to investigate the feasibility of opening up legal advice bureaus.
- b. This conference demands that the existing legal disabilities suffered by African women through laws and ordinances of the Central and Provincial regulations of local administrations be expunged and the status of the African women together with that of all other women be immediately raised to full and equal citizenship without any racial or sexual discrimination.

**8. RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

We, the Black Women of South Africa, observe that South Africa is not at war with any foreign country. However we are alarmed at the disproportionately high

amount budgeted for defence by the South African Government, particularly in view of the fact that the country is not at war with any foreign government. We urge that priority be given to the development of the rural areas occupied by Blacks.

9. **SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT**

We the Black Women of South Africa, reject the policy of separate development in total in view of the fact that it is not viable economically and it divides not only Black from White but also Black from Black.

10. **DETENTIONS**

We, demand the restoration of family life of people imprisoned in terms of racial laws and laws such as the Suppression of Communism Act, the Terrorism Act and all other laws that curb the freedom of expression of South Africans in order to entrench racial domination as conceived by the Nationalist Government.



11. **FRANCHISE**

We, the Black Women of South Africa abhor the fact that the Black Family is totally excluded from all decision-making in the country. We reject the apartheid institution of "Homeland Government, Coloured Representative Council, the South African Indian Council and all institutes of so- called local government such as the Local Affairs and Management Committees, Tribal Councils and Urban Bantu Councils as fraudulent and an affront to Black dignity.

We note that the denial of universal franchise to South African Blacks has ravaged their civil rights and perpetuates their enslavement.

We therefore demand the extension of full equal franchise rights to Blacks and the restoration of South Africa to all her people.