

AE33

Paper AE331

REPORT

THE STRUGGLE OF

WOMEN IN

SOUTH AFRICA

10th December 1983

METHODIST YOUTH CENTRE
(SOWETO)

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1. INTRODUCTION.

It was the first of its kind to be staged in Soweto although for the whole Reef Area. Women came from the West Rand and the East Rand and the Johannesburg area with its attached townships. Some men also joined in. Both women and men together. More than fifty (50) of them.

They were women of all walks of life and classes representatives of all various communities (Although restricted and limited by apartheid laws in the form of permits, etc.) Most of the women's groups were present. Even Youth Organizations, Civic Organizations, etc.

As reported in the December issue of "I.C.F. News" it was "a belated but a timely trigger to relieve the women of their years of anger and frustrations"

It was a "chance to articulate their world of pain and sufferingthe message... 'WE ARE THE MOST OPPRESSED IN ANY SOCIETY ONE CAN THINK OF IN THIS WORLD. IF IT IS AN OPPRESSIVE SOCIETY LIKE THE ONE IN SOUTH AFRICA THEN WE RECEIVE A DOUBLE SHARE'."

2. RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS AT THE SEMINAR.

2.1 Opening Remarks:

The Rev. Bonganjalo Goba started the Seminar by prayer and Rev. Frank Chikane explained how the Seminar was planned, the invitation behind it and the willingness of the I.C.F. to facilitate programmes in this regard from which feminist theology can be developed and the link between women's struggle and the broad struggle for liberation in South Africa. He then welcomed participants to be free to do their thing.

2.2 Ms. Mosala addressed the meeting on the theme: Women and Theology and the relevancy of the Bible on women's struggle. Reading the Bible and practicing it beyond the word. That is the interpretation must be in such a way that what ever importance the word contains must be done as relevant as it should be. It must not be abstract or said in a vacuum, it must not be a pie in the sky type of a thing. A slide was shown on the couple which is in love, making promises between each other. Both the parties are involved in mutual understanding. They share all that they love together as a family unit. It is therefore important for women to realise the love that God has for all human beings regardless of colour, race, sex or creed. It therefore becomes important for women to stand their grounds as women and they too should respond to their situations as it deems fit.

It seemed therefore that women are but their own oppressors. This implies that if women don't fight to free themselves from this self created ocean of oppression, they will never make it for the broader struggle for liberation of the whole nation.

2.3 Rev. Constable on Re-reading the Bible: As a woman priest, Rev. Constable showed in fact the practical reasons for women to get themselves involved, largely not for competition but for the simple reason that they

too are able. Women should unconditionally accept their conditions. Make no excuses for being a woman.

Affirm her position as an image of God. The Bible has always taught the women to love their husbands submissively, that should not be the case husbands should equally love their wives. Stress on involvement in action not only in words. Objective papers or Bible reading should reach more women in the church. Women have always shown passivity. Women don't go forward to challenge and take up whatever thing faces them. Then Rev. Constable stated how she has managed to overcome situations where she found herself leading male meetings.

She has been able to lead female congregations into realizing themselves, that they are able to do things on their own, able to do whatever work, and do it the best.

- 2.4 Sister Bernard. A paper covering the women in various countries (Internationally). She referred charter of women, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international conventions on Human Rights. She also dealt with international solidarity with women in South Africa. It was important therefore for women in South Africa to do practically everything within their powers to fight for their liberation, and the liberation of man-kind in this country.

Women must be final judges of their destinations. Only if women are liberated will there be a just society. Know the oppressor and the liberal the latter meaning lesbian feminism of women fighting against men. - Which is largely a system maintained in the Western Countries. - This is not equivalent to the Third World Women's Liberation, which in fact stresses the freedom of women from exploitation, oppression and segregation on the bases of labour and sex.

2.5 QUESTIONS FOR THE GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. How do we handle problematic passages in scripture.
2. Is it possible to separate tradition, culture or custom from the word of God, both in church and society.
3. Crystallise the various levels of oppression of women in South Africa.

House broke into five groups to discuss all three questions.

2.6 REPORT BACK

After reports were discussed the following were noted:

- (1) Point arose, or a question which is most important which should be discussed by women and always not be forgotten, that is; Liberation of Women and their relationship with the struggle in broader perspective, the on going struggle of human justice and Democratic South Africa.

- (2) Women in the whole of the World are pledging solidarity with women in South Africa, what do women in South Africa do in order to fight this oppression to the bitter end.
 - (3) Women should challenge the black theologian males and link the feminist struggle revealingly with theology.
 - (4) Suggestions: Women should be able to name those oppressions, then decide what to do about them. Each at a time bring them to knowledge of men/husbands. Start strongly with the domestic and social problems.
- 2.7 Ms. Shange addressed the Seminar on "Self Identity and the liberation of self". She emphasised that women must discover who they are before they can be liberated. She called women not to be ashamed of themselves or be apathetic in the face of their oppression and never let themselves to be down trodden.

Women were called to confront God with their feelings about their oppression. That God created them. Question God about the degree of "Free Will" women have. "How free is this free will". She reminded the gathering of the plight of Mary, the mother of Jesus. That after she had conceived of the Holy Spirit Joseph wanted to leave her quietly. But the Angel of the Lord appeared to him and said "This is the King".

She dealt with the images of women portrayed in the Bible and questioned those who portrayed them and their background. She also called on women to transform this image and build the right image of women and their role in the church.

She also dealt with the social system that dehumanize women and sexual oppression by men. Strategies have to be developed to dismantle these systems, structures and traditions.

Women must not fear emancipation but must claim their right in society.

2.0 PLENARY:

The house felt that a few things should be done.

1. More Seminars to be held.
2. Look into the purpose of the "Manyano"
3. Have enough reading material on the Bible, handouts on Bible's teaching.
4. A task force should be formed to create consistency.
5. Present Planning Committee should continue to work on this report.
6. Expand ourselves by contacting yet other women.

2.9 NAMES OF VOLUNTEERS.

1. Mrs. Valentia Khumalo
2. Ms Benny Monama
3. Mrs. Ohara Diseko
4. Ms. Ann Letseba
5. Ms. Lindi Hyeza

2.10 PRESENTATIONS:

The following presentations were made:

FEDSAW	:	by Mrs. Mlangeni	(APPENDIX A)
DWEP	:	by Lolo Tabane	(APPENDIX B)
YWCA	:	by Mrs. Seponya	(APPENDIX C)

3. PAPERS

The papers of Rev. M. Constable, Sister Bernard and Mrs. S. Moale are reproduced here without editing, whilst Ms. T. Shange's address is summarized in the minutes from notes made by secretaries.

READING THE BIBLE ON THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY.

Madam Chairperson and my sisters in Christ. A little over a year ago I was invited to address a group of 600 women in Hong Kong on the suffering and hopes of church women in S.A. It is in the period of preparations that I became aware of this topical view of women as the suffering underdog, the flighty and irresponsible, the unclear, the vehicle for physical labour.

That women are universally relegated an inferior position is clear: That women are so utterly conditioned to accept this position is evident: That many women are satisfied to accept this position is obvious. But, the emerging intellectual homemaker, active social circles, the thinking working mother, is searching the scriptures for answers. She is feeling the pain of the bonds and is beginning to rear her head to assert her position as one created image of God.

Some of the actualities of oppression and suffering into which women are conditioned in church and society are as follows:

(a) In the fact of their faith where some Christians even claim that God is anti-feminist. On the other hand there are feminists who insist that Christianity is anti-woman.

(b) There is also the deminished gauge that society places on homemakers, or housewives' role as evidenced by the position of that role under the law and its practice within the customs of our people

(c) There is the practice of inequality in salary, law, medicine and journalism.

(d) There is the exploitation of housewives: society uses her as an unpaid labourer.

(e) By marriage she is treated as a minor, classified as a child.

(f) In South Africa she is even subjected (or will be in the near future) to a disadvantageous method of taxation with her husband.

(g) Actually, she loses status when she gets married.

Yet, if we re-read the Bible with regard to women, some of the following facts emerge in interpretation: These facts have begun to emerge since the 1960's when research has been made into the rights of women.

1. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 likens the position of the woman and her husband to that of Christ and the church.

(i) He was humble in acceptance of those who were to serve him- He even washed the face of his disciples.

(ii) We read in Philipians 2 verse 8 - that Christ humbled himself

(iii) When we read the book of the prophet Hosea, we learn about the submissive love of the prophet in his marriage to Gomer,

the harlot. We note Hosea's patience and faithfulness. To my understanding all this symbolized God's love for Israel.

- (iv) On reading Matt 16 verse 18 we learn that the church will be a moving force for good in this world, going forward so that the force of evil will not be able to stand or prevail. The church is not standing still, prophesying the status quo. It is a force moving against hatred and prejudice: against despair and poverty and fear. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a positive gospel; a gospel of compassion and caring, a gospel of the love of God.
- 2. A liberated woman is one who has expected the redemptive grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ and who knows that she is a whole and a valuable person in the eyes of God. As a Christian that has been my liberation.
- 3. The message of the entire Bible, and particularly the New Testament when viewed as a whole, is the love and grace of God manifested in Jesus Christ. The basis for Christian relationship, then is not the law, it is love, it's not rigid formula, or a balance of power: it is Jesus Christ.
- 4. To Biblical feminists mutual submission in marriage is accepted. (see Eph. 5 v 21+) wives have to submit to their husbands but husbands are required to love their wives just as Christ loved the church - "so ommissively" Christ gave up "equality with God" and chose to take on human form, submitting himself to death on the cross (Phil. 2: 6-8). He washed the feet of his disciples, and in one post-resurrection appearance he even prepared a meal for them (John 13: 3-17)
- 5. The domination tradition in which I have grown up is one which has opened up all levels of church life to women which is based upon the priesthood of all believers - those who have chosen Christ the living stones, being built into spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (Ref. Peter 2: v.5).
- 6. In several passages in the Gospel, the Love of God is compared with that of a mother, even greater (Matt 23 v. 37). O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not.
- 7. Someone had said that "At his darkest hour all of Jesus closest friends deserted him". "No thy did'nt", come the reply. The women did'nt desert him. (Women were first at the cradle and last at the cross; and also first at the resurrection. They were the ones who stood by as he died, and then went to tomb to anoint his body. It was a world in which a woman's word was held to be so worthless that it was not valid even in a court of law, and yet it was to a woman that Christ first revealed the greatest event in history: the resurrection.
- 8. Why this special devotion for Jesus that is evidenced by women time and again throughout the gospel? because when others thought women to be unclean, Jesus saw through to their faith and declared them pure and spotless; when others thought women to be good for physical labour, Jesus saw them as three-dimensional thinking beings, when others saw women as flighty and irresponsible Jesus

saw them worthy of becoming great.

Even today, when women are not always valued as being full and whole human beings, what may be the most unusual appealing thing about Jesus is that he sees them as being just that.

- 9. Allow me briefly a word on the Heroines of the Bible:
 - (a) Deborah: who emerged as a judge in Israel, during the period of the judge. A woman determining right action for others, without a man helping her make weighty decisions. Her courtroom - a palm tree (Chap. 4 -9 of the book of Judges.) A woman known for her perception and wisdom. She must have been a remarkable woman to rise to such a position of honour and respect, especially in a day when women were normally denominated by men. It was Deborah's leadership that resulted in a breaking of the bonds of oppression.
 - (b) In passing I would mention some more women whose achievements speak for themselves: Sarah, mother of a great nation. God gave the promise to Sarah as well: In Genesis 17 v. 16 he says: "I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations". We are entitled to affirm ourselves as the "daughters of Sarah".
 - (c) What about Rehah: woman of faith, harlot from Jericho who saw the greatness of God of Israel and aided his armies when they came into her land. (Joshua 2) She is mentioned twice in the New Testament as an example of great faith (Heb. 11 v. 31/James 2iv.25) and she is listed in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1.v. 5)
 - (d) Abigail (1 Sam25) - a woman of good understanding and of beautiful countenance, known for her courage, wisdom and diplomacy. Imagine confronting an approaching army that has first been insulted by her husband! She prevented untold bloodshed. The world could use a few more peacemakers like Abigail.
 - (e) There were others: Anne - Prophetess who worked in the Temple and one of the first persons to acclaim Jesus as the Messiah (Luke 21. 36-38) Esther, Jewess who was queen of Persia and who acted bravely to save her people from a plot to exterminate them: Joanna wife of Chuza who left her home to follow Jesus during his earthly ministry (Luke 8: 3) Phoebe a deaconess and minister in the early church (Rom: 16: 1-2)
- These women are just a few illustrations of many women in the Bible: women who always did not fit the norm. We need to look at them, study them, get to know them, and identify with them. No, they were'nt perfect, but considering the patriarchal society in which they lived, many of them lived amazingly liberated lives.
- These women have much to offer us, and exist alongside the men in the Bible as great role models for our children and examples for ourselves. I am convinced that encouraging greater recognition of them will serve to strengthen the fellowship within the church and society. It will lead to heightened appreciation for the contributions that women can make among the men and to greater sense of worth and purpose among the women.

In today's world when women are not always valued as being full and whole human beings, what may be the most unusual appealing thing about Jesus is that he sees them as being. Most amazing is that in his eyes, regardless of the values with which the world may judge women, Jesus sees them as valued, important worthwhile individuals.

REV. H. CONSTABLE

WOMEN AND THEOLOGY.

Church history begins when a few women set out to pay their last respects to their dear dead friend Jesus. It begins when, contrary to all reason and all hope, a few women identify themselves with a national traitor and do what they consider to be right, what in their eyes equals quality of life, viz. loving one who has sacrificed his life, never abandoning him as dead. Church history begins when Jesus comes to them, greets them, lets them touch him just as he had touched and restored them in their lives. Church history begins when the women are told to share with the men this experience, this life they now comprehend, this life their hands have touched.

This story as told by Matthew is generally known as the Easter appearance of the women but never as the beginning of Church history. Officially, church history begins with the mission of the men apostles and, officially, no women are present on that occasion. Right up to the present time many churches have traced their origin back to this apostolic succession. Almost all the leaders of the churches are male and depend mostly on males for their order and their ideas. In the process women's experiences of Jesus have been forgotten - Jesus as a friend who shares their life and is ever near them, a friend who offers them warmth and tenderness in their loneliness and powerlessness. The feminist movement in the western world has given many women the courage to discover themselves, to express again their own religious experiences, to read the Bible with fresh eyes and to rediscover their original and distinctive role in the gospel. So it must be understood that for them feminism is a movement deeply rooted in the gospel.

In the last 15 - 20 years many groups have discovered that God is on the side of patriarchy. It was not christianity that introduced patriarchy into the world. Patriarchy is a very ancient and widespread system of male domination. Christianity proved incapable of successfully opposing this system.

indeed.....

Indeed, quite early on, Christianity was already taken over by men and made to serve patriarchy. This had a crippling effect on its liberating potential, as has been perceived by theologians of hope, liberation theologians and political theologians in other contexts when they discussed the captivity of the church.

To-day women are once again setting out to discover life, to enliven all that has been dead, to know Jesus as the one he once was for them. They are seeking to liberate themselves from the patriarchal domination in which their thinking was done for them as well as for others who were not fully adult. They want to free themselves from being treated like children, to be free from the tutelage which denies them any say at all, or allows them only a limited say, in society. They no longer want to accept the values imparted by the patriarchal world system - either for themselves or for their children or for society as a whole.

WHAT DO WOMEN WANT? I would like to take a little time to consider this question, for many people even in the church are afraid of women. Men are afraid of women who could cause their traditional roles to become insecure. There is a fear of any kind of radicalism which supposedly is not in harmony with the love of Christ. What women want is a new community in which those with power begin to listen to those without power. A community where there are opportunities for the powerless to express themselves and get organized. A community in which power is redistributed and those in power learn to give their power - for the sake of justice. They are able to stand up for all this passionately and credibly because they have first hand experience of what it is like to be treated like children, to be in tutelage, without rights, to live a life second class to that of the man, to give life but to be allowed to fashion it only within a limited domestic circle and not in society as a whole.

What women want is a whole life, one which embraces body, soul, and spirit, no longer compartmentalized into private and public spheres: a life, moreover, which fills us with a trust and hope transcending biological death.

This may seem a huge and impossible utopian programme. Essentially it is simply taking seriously what we read in the prophet Isaiah's visions of peace and in a part of what the apostle Paul once recognized in a flash of inspiration - namely, that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female.

It is also the old vision of the woman which we find in the song of Merriam, one of the oldest passages in the Bible: Trust in the God who has thrown horse and rider (today we may say sex and domination) into the sea. This feminine tradition, which is found in many women's songs - of Hannah, of Deborah, Judith and Mary's magnificat - and which has always been with us, makes us keenly aware of what is happening in the world and what is going on within ourselves, in our bodies, in our souls, and in our spirit.

Women on the way to discover life

Women in a church which is firmly in masculine hands.

In which direction like the way?

Certainly away from a patriarchy in which women have been oppressed, silenced, and unable to speak for themselves. Away too from the church with patriarchal structures. Away from a god who was always tied to patriarchy. For many women, even among us, this decision has still to be made.

Men who wish to discover life for themselves and in community with women must shake off the pressure of patriarchy, as they would some nightmare and eliminate these suppressions of true life, they acquired during their socialisation stage, so as to become full human beings. Patriarchy cuts the man into two halves. It splits him into a subject, (consisting of reason and will) and an object (consisting of heart, feelings and physical needs). He is to identify himself with the former and keep his distance from the latter. This isolates the male and brings about a certain self-hatred. This division in the male is reflected and takes an aggressive form in the male subjugation and domination of the supposedly "frail", "emotional" women. In this manner both men and women are crippled as you all know that oppression of any kind/form has two sides and it destroys humanity on these two sides - the oppressed person is robbed of humanity and the oppressor becomes an inhuman monster. The apparent difference is only that one suffers in consequence, whereas the other appears to feel fine. On both sides, however, liberation from oppression is badly needed.

Women to-day, therefore, should lead the way to a new community of women and men. We need to discover what our life is - our life as women, our life in solidarity with women in the world who suffer all kinds of discrimination, our spiritual life, our life as christian women, a life we want to take hold of, feel endure, change - we have constantly come into collision with the barriers of our christian traditions: our faith is the faith of the "FATHERS" our religious testimonies are derived from a Bible edited by the patriarchs obviously to the exclusion of any female participation.

Can Christian tradition offer us any help to extricate ourselves from this halved life? Where do the sources and motivations exist for this in terms of our identity? What Christian tradition can accompany and support us on the way to wholeness? What Christian tradition can also help the man to be "whole" and give him an identity other than that of a patriarch?

A new community can only mature and bear fruit if women remain autonomous human beings. The contribution they can make to the community will not be a vital and lively one unless they retain their singularity, specificity and distinctiveness as women. The life women have been looking for and have now rediscovered will only become everyone's common concern if they continue to make it their cause. Many women in the church will find this particularly hard to accept, for they have got used to sacrificing themselves readily. Taking a back seat, it has become almost second nature to accept that this is their Christian life style. Men find it hard because they have got used to working with women who are always eager to help and because of the power that goes with man's official position in the church, men have turned the cause of Jesus into a patriarchy of love. We have to relearn what loving means; we must have a love which makes others mature instead of smothering them or glorifying them, a love which creates an area in which there is no domination.

BERNADETTE I. MOSALA

ROLE OF WOMEN IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES (INTERNATIONALLY)

"Womens' emancipation is therefore rebuilding society on new foundations, freeing the initiative of women, integrating them into decision-making and giving birth to the new humanity".

INTRODUCTION

This is an historical moment in the life of concerned women in Southern Africa. I am sure that we will look back and all say that such are the things that made it possible for us to achieve what we have. It is a commitment on our part to engage ourselves and other concerned women in all spheres of life in the struggle for the liberation of women.

We are meeting together in this context for the first time to pool our ideas and efforts and to work out a strategy for the emancipation of women in our concrete situation.

The specific historical context that gives this seminar its importance and significance can be assessed in three ways:

- a) The oppression has gone on for too long for many of us not to avoid being involved in ending it.
- b) We have not seriously looked at oppression as it crushes women and also, how we as women, perceive our oppression.
- c) We are called to involve ourselves in the liberation struggle in order that all struggles against oppression may succeed.

Although our primary concern is the local situation, we must also pay attention to the important role that is played by international solidarity in all struggles. (E.g. Concrete example: The struggle of the exploited people and the solidarity of people who want to build a new society is a decision to create favourable conditions for the final liberation of all peoples). For this reason it has always been an important condition for liberation movements to have an international spirit. It is, therefore, our duty to acquire that spirit. But I would like to emphasise this point: We must be the final judges of our situation, and what it needs for change. This means that we must make serious critical analysis of our situation to enable us to accept only that which is useful to us. We must discover the underlying principles in the strategies and tactics that are employed by other groups. Having discovered these principles, we can then identify our friends, and join hands with them in our struggle.

However, the struggle, locally and internationally, will not be complete without the liberation of women. Internationally, a just society means one thing, viz., we as women must also be liberated. We as women have a different perception of the struggle and its root causes. Oppression affects us in a different way. We know who the liberals are and who are our vicious oppressors. They, at times, may be different from the oppressors of men.

The fact that we are oppressed specifically as women has been recognised even by the U.N. In 1967 the U.N. declared the equality of women and men. This ties up with the other Declarations such as the Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights.

In spite of what I have been saying about the importance of international solidarity, international spirit, etc., we must bear in mind that within that context there are major differences, i.e. first, second and third worlds. E.G.

- The first world has created the two worlds, in econo-socio and political terms. In creating them (1st, 2nd world) it has enslaved us. In other words it has not created, but it also maintains a system that oppresses us.
- To the liberal it is a matter of fact and there is nothing wrong with it, and therefore, no real need for change is called for. But we must recognise this creation for what it really is, - oppressive, - a hindrance to the liberation of humanity.

If there are differences such as mentioned above, it therefore means that the struggle of the women in these different worlds cannot be the same. (I would though, to affirm that we are working for total liberation of all human beings - men, women of the three worlds). Furthermore, some women in some parts of the world have already organised themselves and can point to some small gains, whereas in other parts, including ourselves, women still have to organise themselves. For that reason I would like to ask you not to make any comparisons between others and ourselves. I make this request, not from any fear that such comparisons might bring humiliation upon the women of the third world as the reasons and the differences are clear.

I shall now focus on the basis of women's alienation in the third world:

- a) The system of exploitation;
- b) the ideological and cultural mechanisms of domination;
- c) the nature of antagonism;
- d) the concrete steps that can be taken.

a) The system of exploitation

This is the starting point. To speak of the emancipation of women is to openly admit that we are oppressed and exploited. It is important to understand the basis of that oppression and exploitation. The oppression of women is the result of our exploitation; oppression in society is always the result of imposed exploitation. Colonialism invaded and occupied presentday third world countries for the purpose of exploiting their wealth and labour. In order to exploit them, in order to quell their resistance to exploitation and prevent them from rebelling, the system of oppression was introduced.

- (i) Institutionalised oppression, which has manifested its force over the centuries through the courts, the police, the armed forces, imprisonment, torture and massacres, designed to dismantle cultures and to annihilate the sense of justice and criticism.
- (ii) Spiritual oppression: through superstition and ignorance, designed to destroy the spirit of creative initiative, to reduce the individual to passivity and make her/him accept their exploitative position.

Concrete example: There are a cluster of values embodied in this persuasive oppression, of which without the internalisation of them, this system cannot work. These values are: financial

profits rather than human needs, aggressive individualism rather than integral humanism, competition rather than harmonious co-operation, hierarchic discipline rather than co-ordinated participation, consumerism rather than asceticism, etc.

Persuasive oppression through value-creating bodies such as school/church.

Humiliation and contempt came into being in the process since he who exploits and oppresses tends to humiliate and despise his victims - regarding them as inherently inferior beings. Then racism appeared as the supreme form of humiliation and contempt - on land issues, being dispossessed and displaced - people become pariahs in the land of their birth.

The mechanism of women's alienation is identical to the mechanism of the alienation of the colonised man in the colonial society, and of the worker in a capitalist society. From the moment early man started to produce more than he consumed, the material foundations were laid for the emergence of a stratum in society which would appropriate the fruits of the majority's labour. This appropriation of the product of the masses' labour by a handful of people in society is the essence of the system of the exploitation of man by man and the crux of the antagonistic contradiction which has divided society for centuries. This tendency led to a bureaucratic dictatorship as collective responsibility was doomed to this day. The unleashing of this exploitative process, women as a whole - like men - were subjected to the domination of the privileged strata.

Women are also producers, and workers, but with special characteristics. To possess women is to possess workers, i.e. unpaid workers, whose entire labour power can be appropriated by the husband who is the lord and master, without resistance. In an agrarian economy, marrying a woman was the assurance of great wealth. Hence the important part played by polygamy in the rural areas of a primitive agrarian economy.

Society, realising that women are a source of wealth, demanded that a price be paid for them, thus the bride-price - LOBOLA - was born. The woman is bought and inherited just like material goods, or sources of wealth. But what is more important is that compared to the slave, who is also a source of wealth and an unpaid worker, the woman offers her owner two added advantages. She is a source of pleasure and above all, she produces other workers; she produces new sources of wealth. This last aspect is particularly significant. Society grants the husband the right to repudiate his wife and demand the repayment of the lobola should she prove barren. It can also be noted that in many societies mindful of the value of the labour power of the women's children, it is a current practice for children to continue to belong to the mother's clan or family, if the lobola - the purchase price for this wealth is not paid, thus bringing an excessive emphasis on women's fertility and the transformation of the man-woman relationship into the mere act of pro-creation.

A particular situation also emerged. Owing to this control over the masses, the exploiter acquired vast riches, vast estates, large herds of cattle, gold and jewels and so on. Yet despite his wealth he was still mortal like other men. The question of inheritance became crucial. Women are then producers of heirs.

It is therefore clear that the exploitation of women and their consequent oppression starts in the system of private ownership

(b) The ideological and cultural mechanisms of domination.

A society based on private ownership of the means of production, on the exploitation of man creates and imposes the ideology and culture which uphold its value and ensure its survival.

The economic exploitation of women, their transformation into mere producers with no rights, at the service of their owners - whether husband or father, factory owner, farmer, etc., required the establishment of a corresponding ideology and culture, together with an educational system to pass them on. Obviously, this is not something which happens all at once, but a process developed and refined over thousands of years of the society's existence.

- (i) Obscurity was the beginning of the process. A generally practised principle was to keep women in ignorance or give them only an essential minimum of education. Even today illiteracy is higher among women, they are a minority in schools, colleges, and universities, but are conversely the majority of the population.
- (ii) Science was man's monopoly in the developed civilisations of the past as in present capitalist societies of today. Women were to be kept out of science, prevented from discovering the society they had created, thus could never change it. Obscurity and ignorance go hand in hand with superstition and give rise to passivity and fear.

All superstitions find their most fertile soil among women, because they are submerged in the greatest ignorance and obscurity. In societies some rites and ceremonies are the main vehicles for the transmission of society's concept of women's inferiority, and their subservience to men. It is here too that countless myths and superstitions are propagated with the express intention of destroying women's sense of initiative and reducing them to lethargy.

- (iii) Family education itself emphasises and reinforces women's inferiority. From infancy the girl is brought up differently from the boy and a feeling of subservience instilled into her. None of this is surprising. Exploitative society promotes the ideology, culture and education that serve its interests. It has done so with women and men of the third world. All are deliberately kept in ignorance, obscurity and superstition with a view to making them resigned to their position, of instilling in them an attitude of passivity and servility. Racism comes in to the woman and call her an inferior human being by virtue of her sex. Women are creatures of short ideas (in real terms, women never achieve adulthood).

The process of alienation reaches its peak when the exploited person, reduced to total passivity, is no longer capable of imagining that the possibility of liberation exists and in turn becomes a tool for the propagation of the ideology of resignation and passivity. It must be recognised that the centuries-old subjugation of women has to a great extent reduced them to a passive state, which prevents them from even understanding their condition. The enemy that lives in the mind is the toughest to destroy, for it demands a radical change of values, attitudes and behaviour.

(c) The nature of antagonism

It is important to understand correctly the nature of the contradictions involved, for only after understanding them will we be in a position to define the target of our attack and plan the appropriate strategy and tactics for our struggle. We have seen that the basis of the domination of women lies in the system of economic organisation of society, private ownership of the means of production which necessarily leads to the exploitation of person by person. In other words, it is the same as the contradiction between the working masses and the exploitative social order.

We must be clear on this point. The antagonistic contradiction is not between women and men, but between women and the social order, between all exploited people, both women and men, and the social order. The fact that they are exploited explains why they are not involved in all planning and decision-making tasks in society, why they are excluded

from working out the concepts which govern the economic, social, cultural and political life, even when their interests are directly affected and can make worthwhile endeavours. This is the main feature of the contradiction: their exclusion from the sphere of decision-making in society. Women's emancipation is therefore rebuilding society on new foundation, firing the initiative of women, integrating them in decision-making, giving birth to the new humanity. Apart from the antagonistic contradiction between women and the social order, other contradictions of a secondary nature also arise between women and men as a kind of reflex.

The marriage system, marital authority based solely on sex, the frequent brutality of the husband and his consistent refusal to treat his wife as an equal, are sources of friction and contradiction. If not corrected, these secondary contradictions may become more acute and produce more serious consequences such as divorce, etc. However serious they may be, these factors do not alter the nature of the contradiction.

It is important to stress this aspect, because we now see an ideological offensive taking place particularly in the capitalist world, in the guise of a women's liberation struggle. This ideological offensive is an offensive by capitalism to confuse women, divert their attention from the real target. The aim seems to divert the attention, first of women, secondly of men from the issue which is an oppressive social order. The result is that men on one hand and women on the other are engaged in a futile battle. Bear in mind that, I have said that some of these women's struggles come from secondary contradictions. The fight for women's emancipation demands, initially, the clarification of our ideas. Clarification is imperative due to the incorrect ideas about the emancipation of women.

- a) Those who see emancipation as mechanical equality between men and women. This means that women and men do exactly the same tasks, mechanically dividing their household duties, e.g., if I wash dishes today, you must wash them tomorrow. This says, we must have some right regardless of the objective and subjective conditions. This mechanical concept of the liberation of women leads to complaints and attitudes which utterly distort the meaning of women's emancipation.

What seems to be an emancipated woman in this mould is the one who drinks, smokes, wears trousers and mini-skirts, who indulges in sexual promiscuity, who refuses to have children, etc.

b) Others associate emancipation with the accumulation of diplomas, and particularly university degrees, which are regarded as certificates of emancipation. Yet others think that emancipation consists of achieving a certain economic, social and cultural level. All these are wrong and superficial concepts. Not one of them either gets to the heart of the problem of the women's oppression.

The question is then, what is the underlying crisis which is embodied in the above pseudo concepts (false ideas) of women's emancipation?

We see small manifestations of this offensive appearing among us. Here and there we hear women prattling about men, as if the cause of their exploitation lies in the difference between the sexes, as if men were sadistic monsters who derive pleasure from the oppression of women; maybe some of them are. Men and women are products and victims of the exploitative society which has created and formed them. It is essentially against this society that men and women should fight united. Just as there can be no change without the liberation of women the struggle for women's emancipation cannot succeed without the victory of the men's liberation.

Concretely we should do the following:

- 1) We as women must clarify the wrong ideas about the women's emancipation by intelligently analysing the basis of social, economic, cultural and political levels, locally and internationally.
- 2) Destroy the myths of tribalism and regionalism to combat ignorance and superstition, which oppress us psychologically and deprive us of initiative.
- 3) Mobilise international public opinion in favour of our struggle and to express solidarity as South African women and people with the liberation struggle of the women and peoples of the whole world.
- 4) The last aspect is that of the relationship between men and women, which has been based on the alleged superiority of man over woman, aimed at satisfying the male ego.

Our women's emancipation in practice must destroy the exploitative society, advance the internal struggle, destroy our wrong ideas and release our critical sense and creative initiative. In other words, our commitment to the struggle will then be concrete action, leading us to take part in making decisions affecting our country's future. In this way, women will gradually attain all levels of planning, decision-making and implementation in organising the affairs of children, in schools, factories, hospitals; the armed forces, diplomacy, art, science, culture and so on.

CONCLUSION

Women must unite. Unity is the main weapon of the struggle, and its driving force. United women are called "to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). We must be also aware that the pursuit of this call will mean: "Kings, officials, the priest and the people will be against you." (Jer. 1:18-19).

SISTER M. BERNARD

4. NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS.

- 4.1 Rev. M. Constable: Pastor of the Congregational Church in Coronationville and past President of the church.
- 4.2 Mrs. B. Hosala: Director of Home and Family Life of the South African Council of Churches.
- 4.3 Sister M. Bernard: National Field Organizer of Justice and Reconciliation, Catholic Church.
- 4.4 Ms. T. Shange: National Field Worker of Justice and Reconciliation, Catholic Church.

PRESENTATION OF THE FEDERATION OF
SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN (FEDSAM)

1. Historical Background

The Federation of South African Women was formed in 1954 solely for the purpose of uniting all existing Women's Organizations (then) to fight against the oppression and exploitation of women experienced by the Women of this Country. The African Women have always been victims of these oppressions, the manifold oppression experienced by women is worldwide known and always condemned.

2. Activities of Fedasaw and the August 1976 March to Union Building.

In all its activities the FEDSAM has been fighting against pass laws, influx control laws, which are all instrumental to the division of family units, migratory labour, inferior education and food, and rent increments. We saw its strength through boycotts, such as bus boycotts and rent increases boycotts.

Throughout its activities the Fedasaw has shown the dynamism and strength that organized and united women wield. This was shown in the great march of 9th August 1956 by 20000 Fedasaw women to the Union Building against the introduction of passes for women.

Nevertheless Fedasaw was crippled by the banishment and bannings of its leadership. People like Lillian Ngoyi, Albertina Sisulu, Helen Joseph, Francis Beard and Dorothy Nyembe and many others.

3. Revival of FEDSAM in 1976

During the 1976 students uprisings it became evident to us that there was a need for a women's organization that would voice out the grievances of our community as women.

There was a clear need for resistance against oppression that affected housewives directly, such as rent increments, food prices, so-called compulsory education and many other things. These were realized, and could only be overcome by the United Action of women in conjunction with other organizations.

With this in mind a few concerned women came together to try and reorganize themselves and the community. To do this we approached the old vanguards of FEDSAM to draw on their experiences and together fight against the evils of the apartheid system. We then formed a committee in Soweto and our main thrust was rent rises and education. In 1981 we successfully launched a rent boycott which culminated in a very big demonstration outside the U.B.C.

4. Expansion of the FEDSAM.

Subsequently women's groups have been formed in Kagiso, Izaneen, Daveyton, Mamelodi, Atteridgeville, Turfloop, Medunsa and Glyn Thomas House.

In spite of our concerted effort to reorganize women we have often met with resistance from many women, particularly in the churches. The main reasons been fear of arrest and detention and because of the traditional attitude and teachings of our various churches, women turn to ascribe our difficulties to fate and the "will" of God. The Bible has always been looked at very literally but not contextually in relation to the demands of our situation.

It becomes therefore important for us, as women gathered here to commit ourselves into realizing that our problems as women are social problems that can be dealt with through collective action. Women at home, in churches, at the factory and in all different sectors are in fact a group in themselves, which could come together and fight this oppression.

5. Where to find us ?

Federation of South African Women
c/o Mrs. Greta Maphahle
1533 Dube village
P.O. Dube
1800

ASSOCIATION OF THE YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF THE TRANSVAAL
AFFILIATED TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF WORLD AFFILIATED Y.W.C.A.

A Brief History

The YWCA was started in Great Britain in 1855 by Mrs Emma Roberts and Lady Mansfield.

The World YWCA was formed in 1894 by the National Associations of Great Britain, U.S.A., Sweden and Norway.

South Africa

The YWCA began in Cape Town in 1886 and was for many years an exclusive white women's organization.

Transvaal

The multi-racial content of the YWCA came much later when Mrs Madie-Mall Kuma had the foresight to merge the black Denzele clubs which were operating in the Transvaal with the YWCAs of Durban and Fort Elizabeth, which were originally European. Denzele YWCA of the Transvaal was founded in Sophiatown on the 28th March 1941.

At present there are six Associations:

1. The YWCA of the C.O.S. and Northern Cape.
2. The YWCA of the Transvaal.
3. The Natal-Durban YWCA.
4. The Fort Elizabeth and Eastern Cape YWCA.
5. The YWCA of the Transkei.
6. The YWCA of the Ciskei.

All these Associations are affiliated to the South African Council of World Affiliated YWCA, which in turn is affiliated to the World YWCA. This Council celebrated its 50th Anniversary in July 1967.

Who Are We?

The YWCA serves the Community, without distinction of Race, Nationality, or Religion.

The YWCA is

- A Ecumenical Movement,
- A Women's Movement,
- A World-wide Movement - we work in 85 Countries.

MEMBERSHIP is open to women of all races, nationalities and creeds.

- We stimulate in members a sense of citizenship based on Christian teaching
- Take action as agreed by full members as a non-party organisation, in questions affecting women and girls
- We co-operate with such other National and International Organisations as may further the policy of the Association.

The YWCA is a Volunteer Organisation.
World YWCA means World Fellowship.

To be a member of the YWCA means being a vital part of a World Movement which brings together women of all races and ages; uniting their strengths to achieve a World of Peace with Freedom, Dignity and Justice.

What We Do

We bring people together in

- Fellowship
- Leadership Training Courses and
- Human Relationship Courses
- We have informal classes in Art, Folk-Dancing, Physical Fitness
- Skill training for personal development

in the field of education to attract the interest of:

- Creative and responsible citizenship - accompanied by independence and self-reliance
- Women's Rights
- Literacy, Nutrition, Family Planning and Handicraft, especially in the rural areas
- Discourses, Conferences, Lectures, and Seminars.

We have two Community Centres one in Johannesburg and one in Ekurhuleni.

Every year we organise the World Week of Prayer.

In all that we do, we serve



Future Plans

We are going to organise

- Courses to promote understanding between parents and children.
- Promote good communication between the races
- As a Women's Movement we hope to stimulate discussion amongst, and create new knowledge for women.

We will try to change the life of women in the field of:

- Education
- Public life
- The Church and Work
- Economic Independence.

Share your time and leisure with us and work with us on projects of common interest.

Collection Number: AK2117

DELMAS TREASON TRIAL 1985 - 1989

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand**

Location: **Johannesburg**

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