

The Voice of Women?

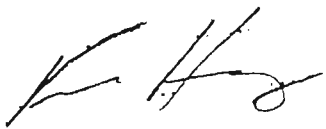
The ANC and the Rhetoric of Women's Resistance, 1976-1989

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Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfilment of a MA by coursework in Historical Studies
at the University of Natal, Durban,
and supervised by Ms. Julie Parle
July 2003.

declaration

I, Kameron Hurley, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work, has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university, and that the sources I have used have been fully acknowledged by complete references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Hurley', with a stylized, cursive script.

Kameron Hurley
July, 2003

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Parle', with a large, elegant cursive 'J' and a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Ms. Julie Parle
July, 2003

abstract

This thesis is an examination of the African National Congress Women's League publication *Voice of Women*, from 1976-1989. The *Voice of Women* was the only regular publication produced in affiliation with the ANC that was directly targeted at -- and primarily produced by -- women. Through an examination of the articles and images within this publication, supplemented with meeting minutes, published interviews, ANC press statements and newspaper articles, this work attempts to understand the relationship between the ANC Women's League as an auxiliary body dedicated to the overall aims of the parent body of the ANC and the Women's League as an organisation capable of forwarding women's rights while putting women's concerns at the forefront of the political landscape. The history of the publication's inception, funding, audience and editorial concerns during the 1971-1979 period are covered in Chapter One of this dissertation, as the language of the publication was honed and refined to a militant pitch. Images of women as mothers and militant fighters are explored in depth in Chapters Two and Four, particularly the use of the term "mother of the nation" as an image promulgated by the ANC as the ideal type of "woman" involved in the liberation movement. Chapter Three covers the negotiation between the ANC Women's Secretariat's desire to launch a campaign against Depo Provera while simultaneously forwarding the aims of the ANC by altering the scope of the campaign to encompass the National Party's family planning programme. Finally, the epilogue of this dissertation briefly addresses the subsequent failure of the Women's League to enact effective women's campaigns inside the country after the unbanning of the ANC in 1990. The political turmoil that the ANCWL experienced under the leadership of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela can be examined as a dissolution of the carefully negotiated landscape the ANCWL tread with the ANC throughout its period in exile as portrayed in the pages of VOW.

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List of abbreviations:

ANC: African National Congress

ANCWL: African National Congress Women's League

COSATU: Congress of South African Trade Unions

CUSO: Canadian University Services Overseas

FSAW: Federation of South African Women

IDAF: International Defense and Aid Fund

IDASA: Institute for Democratic Alternative in South Africa

IFP: Inkatha Freedom Party

MDM: Mass Democratic Movement

MK: Umkhonto we Sizwe

NEC: National Executive Committee

UDF: United Democratic Front

VOW: Voice of Women

WIDF: Women's International Democratic Federation

Background and Introduction

The ANC and Women's Resistance

Critiques of the ANC Women's League inside of South Africa post-1994 have addressed the failure of the popular League as a voice of progressive change for women. With the re-election of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela¹ in 1997 as president of the League, one critic charged that the League had now become "as moribund and ineffectual as most post-independence women's party organisations have become elsewhere."² One of the reasons given for the failure of the Women's League post-1994 is its historic position as a sub-unit of the ANC instead of an autonomous body capable of campaigning for women's rights without answering for or adhering to the politics of the dominant party.

Geisler and others have argued that because of their existence as members of an auxiliary organisation relative to the patriarchal body of the ANC, the women involved in the League lacked the necessary "autonomy to pursue independent actions"³ that would have strengthened the League into a champion of women's rights post-1994. The Federation of South African Women, formed in 1952-53 with the explicit purpose of broadening women's

¹ Winnie Mandela altered her name to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela after the separation between she and her husband, President Nelson Mandela, in 1996. For purposes of consistency, I refer to her by the name she uses as of the writing of this dissertation in 2003.

² Quoted in Gisela Geisler. "'Parliament is another terrain of struggle': women, men, and politics in South Africa". *Journal of South African Studies* (38: 4 2000), 616. Geisler quotes this phrase from the *Weekly Mail (Mail & Guardian)* article of 09/05/1997 written by Rhoda Kadalie titled, "Women's League is Dying." A 14/06/2000 article in the *Mail and Guardian* titled "Winnie in Hot Water with ANC," also quotes ANC party president Thabo Mbeki, who admitted that the Women's League had become as characterised by "poor mass activism" and "low levels of political consciousness among members," as well as "distance between the leadership and membership and between the league and women in localities." He also accused the ANCWL of "disunity and lack of cohesion at the leadership level." The conviction of Women's League president Winnie Madikizela-Mandela on fraud charges in April of 2003 will leave the league without a president, as Madikizela-Mandela says she will resign from the ANCWL "in the fullness of time." See *Mail and Guardian*, 25/04/2003, "Winnie Goes to Jail, Resigns as MP." The post-1990 situation of the ANCWL and its troubled relationship with the general body of the ANC will be further explored in the Epilogue and Conclusion of this thesis.

³ See Geisler, "'Parliament is another terrain of struggle'" and also Sheila Meintjes, "Gender, nationalism and transformation: Difference and commonality in South Africa's past and present" in *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism*. (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1998). For more on the Federation of South African Women, an autonomous body made up of women's organizations, including the ANC Women's League, see Cherry Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. (Cape Town: David Philip 1991)

roles in the national liberation movement, is one example of an early conglomeration of women's groups that were able to act autonomously. However, very little attention has been given to the peculiar nature of the interactions between the Women's League as an auxiliary branch and the ANC as its patriarchal head. It would be incorrect to assume that the Women's League did not benefit from being affiliated with the ANC's broader movement. Nor was the relationship as simple as a purely top-down method of political dissemination that relegated the Women's League to the position of complete subordination to the will of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC. As expressed by one League member, the League's ability to make its own decisions was most severely undercut after the ANC went into exile, at which point "the ANC felt that there should be one organization in exile, and that we should carry out our work collectively."⁴ This collectivising of the auxiliary units of the ANC in exile created interesting tensions between the dominant political agenda of the ANC promulgated through its Department of Information and Publicity and the women's issues the head of the Women's Section and League publications staff endeavoured to pursue.

Through an examination of the official Women's League publication *Voice of Women*, produced by the Women's Secretariat in Lusaka, Zambia, this thesis intends to illustrate the negotiation of the ANC Women's Secretariat in Lusaka as both a women's movement concerned with issues of particular interest to women, and as a loyal auxiliary unit of the ANC committed to supporting the movement's broader political policies. This was by no means an easy or entirely comfortable relationship. The small staff of VOW during the 1976-1989 period examined in this thesis was in constant flux as women arrived and departed from Lusaka. It was the voices of these women that called for greater involvement of the ANC's Department of Information and Publicity in the production of VOW, a plea that neatly

⁴ Interview with Mavivi Manzini in Diana E. H. Russell, *Lives of Courage: Women For A New South Africa*. (New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1989), 127-28.

coincided with the ANC's interest in "mass mobilisation" of the people of South Africa into a militant political force inside the country.

More broadly, this work is situated within the history of women's involvement in political protest within South Africa, particularly within the African National Congress. Women's resistance against Apartheid prior to the 1976 Soweto uprising has largely been analyzed in both Julia Wells and Cheryl Walker's works regarding women's protests against the pass laws in 1913-17 and the 1950s. Women's protests against the early pass laws in 1913-17 gave rise to the ANC-affiliated Bantu Women's League, which was recognized as being ANC-affiliated in 1931.⁵ After 1943 women were able to enter into the ranks of the ANC as full members, and an appropriate ANC auxiliary, the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) was created. The League, as its predecessor, functioned primarily as a body that organized women for the ANC's 1952 Defiance Campaign and mass pass protests of 1956-57.⁶

This work also fits into both the history of women's resistance explored by Wells and Walker, and the history of the propaganda machinery of the ANC and resistance press of South Africa more broadly. The promotion of the ANC's ideas and dissemination of information about the organization was of particular importance from the 1950s onward. The creation and distribution of ANC publications remained an intrinsic part of the ANC's overall strategy against apartheid. During the mid-century, the ANC generally relied on newspapers supportive of the ANC's policies, newspapers such as the *Cape Guardian*, and later, *Bantu World*, and the major publications of the Communist Party, *Freedom*, and *Inkululeko*. The ANC did not have official control over the reporting of these publications, but ANC president

⁵ A Short History of the ANC Women's League. ANC Publication. Available at: <http://www.anc.org.za/wl/docs/history.html>. See also Julia Wells, *We Now Demand! The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa*. (Cape Town: Witswatersrand University Press 1993) and Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. (Cape Town: David Philip 1991).

⁶ Gisela Geisler. "Parliament is another terrain of struggle." For more on ANCWL see Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*.

Alfred Bitini Xuma and the Congress Youth League were able to gain the support of the newspaper *Inkundla ya Bantu*, which played a major role in the dissemination of Congress ideas on the ideology of “African Nationalism.” As Julie Frederikse’s work on propaganda inside South Africa illustrates, the pages and images inside of such publications became the words and pictures disseminated to an increasingly widespread and international audience, effectively publicizing South Africa’s “war with itself”⁷ into the homes of many countries, key numbers of which would later go on to impose sanctions on South Africa in response to the public outcry such images instilled. Frederikse’s work is especially essential in the examination of magazine articles, newspaper reports, and their perpetuation of – or defiance of – the images of “terrorists,” protestors, trade unions, and debates around conscription, detainees and forced removals in the 1980s. Another notable work that explores the history of the resistance press within South Africa is Les Switzer and Mohamed Adhikari’s *South Africa’s Resistance Press*, which offers a detailed account of the history of resistance publications inside of South Africa. Included in their collection of articles about the press is Jeremy Seekings’s article on “The Media of the United Democratic Front [UDF], 1983-1991.” The UDF was an internal movement with strong ties to the ANC, and Seekings explores the relationship of the UDF with the left-wing press publications during this period, and also examines the media the organization produced on its own and disseminated inside South Africa.⁸ Yet the ANC’s journals produced outside of the country and smuggled in are not examined in either of these works, nor are any publications specifically aimed at women, as VOW was. Inside of the country, the women’s organisation Black Sash produced a publication called *Sash* from 1960 to the early 1990s. *Sash* carried articles on both the advancement of women’s rights and protests against apartheid, the chief issue around which

⁷ Julie Frederikse. *South Africa: A Different Kind of War*. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), 7

⁸ See Les Switzer and Mohamed Adhikari (eds). *South Africa’s Resistance Press*. (Athens: Ohio Center for International Studies, 2000) and Jeremy Seekings, “The Media of the United Democratic Front: 1983-1991” in above, 223-257.

the women's organisation had centred itself. Both Kathryn Spink and Cherry Michelman have written on the history of this particular organisation in their works, *The Black Sash: the beginning of a bridge in South Africa* and *The Black Sash of South Africa: a case study in liberalism*, respectively.⁹

As early as the 1950s, the ANC recognized the need for its own press to produce publications for dispersal both nationally and internationally, but funds from donations and membership fees were lacking¹⁰. In 1960, the ANC was banned inside of South Africa and forced to move its organization abroad. As Scott Thomas effectively illustrates in his work, *The Foreign Relations of the ANC Since 1960*, the survival of the ANC as a potent political movement was in serious jeopardy by the mid-1960s.¹¹ Because of its status as a banned organization operating abroad, the ANC could only make itself internationally visible through its Department of Information and Publicity, responsible for everything from “press releases claiming credit for bomb attacks to smuggling copies of ANC literature in South Africa.”¹²

After the Treason and Rivonia Trials in the early 1960s, there was a relative lull in the visibility of the ANC organization. The National Party spent the period between 1960 and 1976 entrenching the state's control over the population through the apartheid policies it had begun implementing in the 1950s. This “repressive period”¹³ saw very little ANC activity inside the country. Radio Freedom, broadcast from outside the country, began its first broadcasts in 1967. In 1970 ANC pamphlet bombs were dispersed in Cape Town, but this appears to be the only mass distribution of ANC propaganda inside the country prior to the 1973 Durban strikes. Later, the students involved in the Soweto uprisings of 1976 testified

⁹ See Kathryn Spink, *The Black Sash: The beginning of a bridge in South Africa*. (London: Methuen Publishing Ltd, 1991) and Cherry Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa: a case study in liberalism* (London: IRR, 1975)

¹⁰ Peter Walshe. *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress, 1912-1952*. (London: C. Hurst & Company 1970), 383-84

¹¹ Scott Thomas, *The Foreign Relations of the ANC Since 1960* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996)

¹² Stephen M. Davis. *Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South African's Hidden War* (New York: Yale University Press 1987), 53

during the TRC hearings of their knowledge of Radio Freedom, ANC policies of African Nationalism, and illegal ANC pamphlets describing forms of resistance against Apartheid. Stephen Davis argues that the ANC's most noticeable involvement in the Soweto student uprisings was its role in "propagandizing".¹⁴

My interest in this period follows from my previous work on the influence of ANC ideas on the actions of youth in particular during the 1980s. My bachelor's thesis, *Political Bodies: The ANC and Student Militancy Against the Apartheid State, 1961-1992* uses accounts of student activists obtained by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as prior published accounts in an attempt to ascertain the degree of influence the ANC had over the actions of student activists during this period. Through my examination of TRC hearings and other interviews, I found the popularity of the ANC and the prevalence of its ideas among the youth to far outweigh the collective knowledge of other organizations, and I became fascinated with the way in which the ANC, apparently little different from other black liberation movements begun inside of South Africa, had come to the forefront of popular consciousness and made the often uneasy transition from mass movement to political party.¹⁵ Among the documents I went over during the course of that research, I read the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) military code,¹⁶ a document that indicated that women made up the ranks of this militant wing of the ANC. This led to an exploration of the role of women inside of the ANC, from the inception of the ANC Women's League and women's status as full members in 1943 to the formation of the new South African Constitution and discussion of the 30% women's quota of parliament seats in the early 1990s. My particular interest in ANC propaganda and its effect on internal and international opinions of the organization led

¹³ Stanely Greenburg quoted in Les Switzer, and Mohamed Adhikari (eds), *South Africa's Resistance Press* (Athens: Ohio Center for International Studies, 2000), 3

¹⁴ Davis, *Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South African's Hidden War*, 31.

¹⁵ See Kameron Hurley, "Political Bodies: The ANC and Student Militancy Against the Apartheid State, 1961-1992." Unpublished BA Dissertation (Historical Studies, University of Alaska, Fairbanks 2000).

¹⁶ Umkhonto we Sizwe Military Code. Available at: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mkcode.html>

me to an examination of the ANC's publications, particularly the journal of its Women's League, *Voice of Women*.

The official journal of the ANC, *Sechaba*, begun in 1967, was funded by the German Democratic Republic and, like the rest of its publications, was printed and distributed out of Lusaka, Zambia. Other ANC publications launched included *Mayibuye*, a publication aimed at organizers and activists inside the country; the *ANC Weekly News Briefings*; and *Dawn: The Journal of Umkhonto we Sizwe*, meant to "raise the political consciousness of the cadres;" *Worker's Unity*; and *Forward*, the journal of the ANC Youth League, and *Rixaka*, a cultural magazine aimed at "artists and cultural workers"; and in 1987, *Phakamani*, with the intention "to address and mobilize the religious community on issues related to our struggle."¹⁷

Though *Sechaba*, and later, *Dawn*, both made efforts to include at least one weekly article aimed at women, there still existed no publication focused directly at inspiring female resistance until the 1971 launch of the ANC Women's Section magazine *Voice of Women*. Considering the long history of women's involvement in the struggle against the pass laws, a publication whose audience and subject matter pertained specifically to women was long overdue. The original intent of VOW was to educate "the international community on the plight and disabilities suffered by black women as they suffer threefold oppression and exploitation under the apartheid-colonial system."¹⁸ Meaning that even at its inception, VOW was first and foremost dedicated to struggle against apartheid and women's liberation from the system of apartheid – not the system of patriarchy. VOW's target audience consisted of women's organizations, solidarity groups, non-government organizations and "all groups and individuals interested in *women and liberation*. [emphasis mine]"¹⁹ The choice of wording

¹⁷ *Sechaba*. June 1990, 22. Available at: www.disa.nu.ac.za

¹⁸ Mayibuye Archives. University of the Western Cape. ANC-Political MCH22.5 "Report on Voice of Women for Publications Workshop Lusaka." 1983

¹⁹ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection.(VOW No 4 1977), 4.

was specifically women *and* liberation, not women's liberation. When women's liberation was discussed in the pages of VOW it was discussed in terms of liberation from apartheid. Only later, as the late 1980s moved into the early 1990s, did such a distinction become possible, as apartheid was slowly dismantled and women were able to attempt a more concerted move toward forwarding women's liberation without being fettered by political allegiance.

While *Sechaba* acted as the official magazine of the ANC, *Voice of Women* was to be the official magazine of the ANC Women's Section, and its audience remained limited to those individuals and institutions outside of South Africa. Unfortunately, African women inside of the country, particularly in the rural areas, were largely illiterate, and producing a publication which was already considered illegal inside of South Africa to an audience who could not understand the text would have been an ineffectual use of limited funding and staffing resources. This attitude toward "the masses" of South African women would, however, change as the ANC mounted its "People's War" in 1985. As bannings and detentions increased during the 1980s, so too did the ANC's interest in recruiting the aid of women to the cause. By 1980, Radio Freedom had its own half-hour program called "Dawn Breaks: The Voice of the ANC's Women's Section" aimed specifically at persuading women to become involved in MK and the rural struggle. The 1980s also saw a shift in VOW's target audience, which coincided with the ANC's new push for a "people's war."

While the majority of the copies of VOW would go to various ANC offices in London, Lusaka, and neighbouring African states, VOW's hundreds of subscribers were, of necessity, located outside of South Africa. Images of outraged or victorious African women, illustrations of women with guns and children in their arms, and stories about deplorable prison conditions for women were thus disseminated all over the world. This imagery of women became a part of what the outside world knew of South Africa.

Chapter One of this thesis will give a brief background of the history of VOW from its inception and concerns for the publication expressed by the women involved. Through an examination of VOW's content during the period, as well as of meeting minutes and correspondence of the women involved in the publication, this chapter will show that though the women involved in the journal's production had a degree of autonomy in their decisions about the writing of articles, they suffered from a lack of staff, funding, and publications experience that severely undercut their attempts to broaden their audience and improve the content and format of the journal.

Chapters Two and Four will examine the power of women's imagery in the pages of VOW. Chapter Two will focus on the early 1980s, when women and women's militancy were becoming increasingly important to the ANC. Chapter Four will examine the evolution of these images in the 1985-1989 time period, during the ANC's push for a "People's War." The power of women's imagery has been discussed by Sharon MacDonald in her introduction to *Images of Women in Peace and War*. Imagery, she says, is "by no means a superficial phenomenon: it is the means through which we articulate and define the social order and nature; and the concern here is not only with symbolism and imagery on the large and public scale, but also with the ways in which women's lives may be affected in their most intimate detail."²⁰ Cynthia Enloe also explores the image of the armed female revolutionary and the rhetoric around it, and asserts that this merging of women as caregivers and fighters often makes it easier for women to simply put down their guns once the threat has passed and resume their previous socially acceptable roles as mothers and caregivers, an argument that will be taken up in Chapter Two and explored again in the Conclusion of this thesis.

These images of women in VOW's pages began to advertise an image of the ideal "African" – and later, the ideal "white" -- woman dedicated to the liberation of her country.

Whether a fictional image or not for the millions of women in South Africa, the armed female revolutionary quickly became a ubiquitous symbol of African liberation movements during the 1980s²¹, and the slogan, “A woman’s place is in the struggle” became increasingly popular.²²

Chapter Three will examine VOW’s treatment of the state’s family planning initiative, Depo Provera and expand on the role of mothers in the movement begun in Chapter Two. The 1980s was the time in which VOW’s images of the female revolutionary became more prominent, the stories of female MK members more frequent, and in the 1983-84 period, the apartheid government’s national Family Planning Initiative was attacked as a “racist ‘family planning system (sic)... aimed at the systematic reduction of the black population.”²³ Yet the initiative was not originally conceived of by the staff of VOW as being a campaign against family planning. This was a campaign whose scope altered from an attack on Depo Provera to an attack on all methods of contraception provided by the family planning clinics, thus altering VOW’s original campaign so that it better reflected ANC policy, effectively ignoring the complex issue of contraception by attacking the limitation of birth altogether.

Finally, the concluding chapter of this thesis will look at the rocky road from anti-apartheid movement to women’s movement that the League undertook upon the unbanning of the ANC in 1990. The ANCWL’s success in women’s appointments to Parliament, contrasted with its apparent dislocation from grassroots women’s movements, is a problem echoed in VOW from its inception. The divide between women returning from exile, many of whom would go on to fill government positions, and women inside the country remained. The *Voice*

²⁰ Sharon MacDonald, Pat Holden and Shirley Ardener (eds), *Images of Women in Peace and War*. (London: Macmillan Education, 1987), 23.

²¹ See Macdonald, *Images of Women in Peace and War* and Cynthia Enloe *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives* (London: Pandora Press 1988)

²² See, among others, Barbara Schreiner (ed), *A Snake With Ice Water: Prison Writings by South African Women*. (Johannesburg: Congress of South African Writers 1992), 123.

²³ University of Durban-Westville. Documentation Centre. Phyllis Naidoo Collection. Box 11. Folder 178: Women (VOW No. 1 1984), 12.

of Women had become the voice of women in exile, women with strong ties of loyalty to the ANC movement and international women's organisation, but very little real contact with women in rural areas whose voices and positions were predominately those the writers and editors of VOW believed they were seeking to illuminate to a broader audience. After 1994, VOW disappeared all together, as its original concept, to educate an international audience about women's lives under apartheid, had technically become redundant. However, the problem of voicing the concerns of poverty-stricken women to a broader audience would continue to remain.

Chapter One: A Voice for Women

I.1971-1976

Staying Afloat: Procuring Funding -- and an Audience

“The appearance of the first issue of *Vow*, the militant voice of the revolutionary women of South Africa, is an important step forward in the overall mobilisation effort of the entire liberation movement, under the leadership of the ANC.... *Vow* will no doubt help the consolidation of the militant solidarity of the international democratic women’s organisations with the heroic women fighters for the cause of national liberation and defence of women’s rights in South Africa. It will at the same time inspire with new confidence the women who are courageously bearing the torch of the struggle for freedom under conditions of fascist terror inside South Africa.”

--Alfred Nzo, ANC Secretary General, at the launching of VOW in 1971 ¹

The early 1970s were a time of almost complete invisibility for the banned African National Congress and its auxiliary organisations, including its military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), and its Women’s League, all of which had been forced into operations abroad a decade before when the organisation was banned inside South Africa in 1960. Until the collapse of colonial rule in Angola (1974), Mozambique (1975) and Zimbabwe (1979) the ANC was kept isolated from the nearest border countries of South Africa. Its closest link to South Africa inevitably became its mission in Lusaka, Zambia, where it set up a “provisional headquarters.” ² Most of the ANC’s organizational and publicity work was conducted in their London office, but Lusaka became the headquarters of the ANC Women’s Secretariat, responsible for the smaller women’s units made up of female ANC and ANCWL members living in or near the ANC missions abroad.

While apartheid was still firmly entrenched in South African society, and the South African military continued to patrol the borders for “insurgents” posted abroad, the only popularized ANC “event” during the early 1970s were the pamphlet bombs of ANC propaganda set off once during rush hour in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban. It was

¹ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Political. MCH22.5 “Report on Voice of Women for Publications Workshop Lusaka.” 1983.

² Scott Thomas. *The Diplomacy of Liberation: The Foreign Relations of the ANC Since 1960* (London: IB Tauris Publishers, 1996), 43

during this lull in ANC's visibility that the ANC's Women's Secretariat in Lusaka, after being compelled by activist Florence Mophosho,³ resolved to put out a small, hand-stapled publication to serve as the official publication of the ANC Women's Section. Mophosho, a dedicated ANC activist, was among the 20,000 women who marched to the Pretoria Union Building to protest the women's pass laws in 1956. The ANC asked her to leave the country in 1964, and in 1970, she became the Women's Section representative to the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in Berlin where she remained for four years, travelling to various countries on behalf of the WIDF and publicizing the ANC's campaign, improving relations between the ANC and GDR. Mophosho's experience appealing to such a varied international audience showed itself prominently in the pages of VOW, particularly in 1974, when she returned from the GDR to act as head of the ANC Women's Section and editor of VOW.⁴

Before VOW's appearance in 1971, the main body of the ANC had been running a monthly publication, *Sechaba* as "the official organ of the African National Congress" for four years. The launch of a separate journal for the ANC Women's Section during a time of complete isolation for the ANC involved a small staff made up purely of volunteers who cut their own stencils, ran off copies, and stapled all of the journals by hand. The costs incurred during this early period were subsidized from the collective funds of the ANC movement.⁵ The only viable audience for a publication put out by an isolated liberation movement without a consistently reliable way of moving publications inside of a country (in which ownership of said publications resulted in jail sentences for the bearers) was an international audience. At its inception, *Voice of Women* (VOW) was created with "the aim of educating the international community on the plight and disabilities being suffered by Black women; in

³ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 2 and 3. 1985), 9

⁴ Ibid, and *Sechaba* (November 1985), Obituary of Florence Mophosho available at: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/people/fmophosho.html> or alternatively <http://www.disa.nu.ac.za>

particular African women as they suffer the three-fold oppression and exploitation under [sic] Apartheid system. It also exposes the inhuman conditions under which children suffer, even before birth.”⁶

Unlike *Sechaba*, whose entire cost of printing and distribution was shouldered by the German Democratic Republic Solidarity Committee, VOW was forced to rely on funding left-over in the ANC’s rather paltry coffers⁷, and later, subscription fees, fundraising efforts and requests for funding from international organisations. The lack of time, resources, personnel and funding meant that VOW, though begun as a quarterly journal, came out sporadically from its inception until about 1976. In exile, the ANC lacked a core to centre itself around. Offices were widespread, from Dar-Es-Salaam to London to Maputo (after Angolan independence) to Cairo. Money for transport, communications, and everyday living expenses was short. Out of touch with those inside of the country, VOW relied on dispatches from the Solidarity News Service, an “intelligence gathering” group affiliated with the ANC based out of Botswana,⁸ and a handful of other publications, from which to glean its own articles, including local papers in Tanzania and Zambia and newspapers from within South Africa. Other publications listed as sources for the staff were *Social Review*, *Civil Rights*, *Outlook*, *SASPU National*, *Critical Health*, *Pulse for Children*, *Molo Songololo* and *African Women’s Handbook of Law*. Many articles also overlapped with those of *Sechaba* and

⁵ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Political MCH14.2 “Production and Distribution of ‘Voice of Women’ (VOW)”. Undated.

⁶ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Political. MCH14.2 “Production and Distribution of ‘Voice of Women’ (VOW)”. Undated.

⁷ Stephen Davis. *Apartheid’s Rebels: Inside South Africa’s Hidden War*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 72. Figures for the running of the ANC organisation as of the writing of Davis’s work were about \$50 million per annum. However, this amount had to maintain the entire operation, and administrators and soldiers made only \$26 per month. \$8.33 for students. The ANC depended primarily on donations from governments and international organisations, though it also held fundraisers and had its own “income-generating projects.”

⁸ Document titled “ANC Terror Hideouts Destroyed.” Hosted by Wandoo News Service, Netherlands. Available at: <http://home.wanadoo.nl/rhodesia/gaberone.htm>

Mayibuye.⁹ All three publications used bulletins from the Solidarity News Service as a source, and both often wrote obituaries for the same fallen ANC members. All Solidarity News Service bulletins came in addressed to the ANC'S Department of Information and Publicity in Lusaka, and included news items, notices of meetings, demonstration information, and arrests.¹⁰

The recurring themes of VOW articles during this period were those describing the plight of women in prisons, and the situation of categorically "Black"¹¹ children under the strictures of apartheid, and as early as 1974, VOW was receiving and publishing letters from subscribers from locations as divergent as New Zealand, Berlin, and Evanston, Illinois.¹² VOW was seen as a medium through which the situation of women under apartheid could be articulated to a wider international audience. For the ANC to topple apartheid, it needed international aid, both in the form of financial aid and political backing to convince members of the United Nations to impose trade sanctions on South Africa that would force the regime to begin dismantling Apartheid.

VOW, like *Sechaba*, sought the same ends as the broader organization: support for the ending of apartheid, but did so through different means - by appealing to the women's and international organisations like the Women's International Democratic Federation, the Canadian University Services Overseas, and the Africa Fund, as well as sympathizers of women's movements, with articles describing women in confinement:

Over courtyard walls screams are often heard of prisoners who seek momentary [sic] escape from the desolation of their lives. this (sic) hysteria is familiar to anyone with experience of women's prisons. In such places feelings are kept under tight control as

⁹ *Mayibuye* was an ANC newsletter published out of Lusaka twice a month, and was "designed for the organisers and activists of the movement inside the country, who are expected to mobilise and organise the oppressed and exploited masses of our country for the aims and objectives of our struggle." *Sechaba* (June 1990), 22. Available at: <http://www.disa.nu.ac.za>

¹⁰ *Mayibuye* Archives. ANC Collection-Political. MCH12.1 Solidarity News Service Bulletins. 1975-1982.

¹¹ For the purposes of this thesis, I use the terms "Black," "White," "Coloured" and "Indian" in respect to which peoples fell under these categories used under apartheid, which classified peoples using a combination of physical/cultural/and political factors that designated "members" of each of these castes in this system.

¹² SAHA Archives, University of the Witwatersrand. Karis-Gerhart Collection: Political, ANC Journals, Vol 161. (VOW No 4 1974), 17.

it is infectious and always has a bad effect on prisoners making them edgely (sic) and lowering their spirits.

Women who dare try to escape are sentenced to one year solitary picking sisal fibre in their cells and that stuff tears their hands to pieces.¹³

As well as testimonials of individuals affected by the absence of institutions for black children:

Born of black parents, Wilson is 17. Severely mentally and physically handicapped, he squats on his twisted legs on the grass outside his home in Lamontville, Durban (SA).

His parents cannot afford a wheelchair, so he does not go anywhere. This has been his life for 17 years. He has no other future in sight. He was born with brain damage and he was born black.¹⁴

Articles like these worked at giving a particular view of life under apartheid for the majority of the South African population. This was the venue to air grievances in the matter of “justice” under the apartheid system through illustrations of injustices particularly aimed at women and children:

A white farmer who killed a one-year-old Black baby girl by striking her with a shambok (whip) was fined £ 13.00 by a court in Transvaal... Yet another case of justice -- South African style.¹⁵

And when recent cases could not be found through the perusal of daily newspapers and other journals, VOW's staff relied on past events in the history of the women's struggle against apartheid to fill its pages, including articles about Helen Joseph and Lilian Ngoyi and their work during the 1950s anti-pass campaign.¹⁶ “Special Issues” of VOW were produced sporadically, differentiated from the regular issues by their slightly bigger size and longer page-length. These were printed on occasions such as August 9th, in commemoration of Women's Day, and December 16th, the birth date of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC. “The main rationale for doing this was that the issue needed extra coverage but

¹³ SAHA Archives. Karis-Gerhart Collection: Political, ANC Journals, Vol 161. (VOW No 4 1974), 2.

¹⁴ Ibid, 1

¹⁵ Ibid, 6

¹⁶ SAHA Archives. Karis-Gerhart Collection: Political, ANC Journals Vol 164. (VOW No 3 1974), 5-6

at the same time it iwas [sic] not pssibel[sic] to devote a whole issue of Vow to the matter, since there are constantly such a broad range of issues to be covered at any one time.”¹⁷

Due to lack of finances, VOW was only printed in English, and the style and tone of the wording was highly confrontational, with a leftist slant that mirrored the language of *Sechaba*. VOW used the language of revolution and revolt, repression and detention, calling for the sort of united revolution of the masses that would overthrow not necessarily “apartheid” but “the white racist regime,” cries taken up at the end of articles about injustices, and at the end of obituaries on the last page of the journal:

Comrade `J.D.` has died an honourable death. The only fitting tribute is to redouble our efforts in realising his aims. His last clarion call was Unity of all revo-lutionary forces!

The death of our martyrs must be avenged! No letter and parcel bombs will deter us from our determination to carry on from where he left off.¹⁸
and:

It cannot be ignored that the working conditions of women differ in accordance with their life in socialist, capitalist, developing states as well as the countries which are suffering from fascist regimes, foreign domination, colonialism, neo-colonialism and Zionism.¹⁹

During the height of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, the ANC’s main source of support remained that which had sustained it from the beginning -- the Soviet Union, not the United States. The first members of Umkhonto we Sizwe were sent for training in the Soviet Union. ANC training camps and bases were more likely to be looked upon favourably if the country they worked within was on good terms with the Soviet Union. Many of the ANC’s key members in the 1950s and 1960s had been or remained members of the Communist Party. It comes as no surprise, then, that the language employed in the ANC propaganda publications was the rhetoric of mass resistance and revolution believed necessary for a Marxist overthrow of the state. The language and political rhetoric of

¹⁷ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Lusaka. MCH22.5

¹⁸ SAHA Archives, Karis-Gerhart Collection: Political, ANC Journals. Vol 161 (VOW No 4 1974), 19.

¹⁹ SAHA Archives, Karis-Gerhart Collection: Political, ANC Journals. Vol 161 (VOW, Special Issue on International Women’s Year 1975), 19.

VOW could not help but promulgate ideas of massive upheaval and revolution, with a “white, racist, bourgeoisie” as its primary foe. However, this did mean that avenues for the funding of VOW and other ANC endeavours were limited to Communist or Socialist groups or sympathizers or international aid organisations.

In 1975, VOW made a plea for, and received, funding for its printing and distribution costs from the Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO). CUSO later sponsored two women from the Women’s Secretariat to travel to Canada and speak out about life under apartheid at conferences in Montreal, Ottawa, and several other Canadian cities.²⁰ Yet it was not until 1976 that the ANC, and subsequently, its Women’s Section, began the long trek from exile and obscurity, a trek that would never quite take it to the audience it may have hoped for, but a trek that kept it afloat during a time in which the ANC’s propaganda machine was becoming increasingly important. The ANC’s ability to make itself appear at the forefront of the liberation struggle, and its popular support at home, would later elevate the status of the ANC from among the numerous banned political organisations of South Africa to the dominant political party elected into power in the “New South Africa.”

To get to this point, the ANC needed more funding and new recruits, neither of which seemed forthcoming in the lull of the 1960s and early 1970s. The events of the early and mid-1970s would begin to change that. The Soweto student protests on June 16th, 1976 led to a number of students leaving the country, many of which ended up in ANC camps abroad. The spark that set off this demonstration has been attributed to a number of factors, including the spread of the Black Consciousness movement inside the country, which promoted a sense of “black pride”, particularly among students; the strikes of nearly 200,000 workers in 1974-75, and the sporadic propaganda pamphlets of the ANC and PAC smuggled into the country.

²⁰ SAHA Archives. Karis-Gerhart Collection. Political, ANC Journals. Vol 162. (VOW No 3 1977).

Police responded to this massive crowd of protesting students by firing into the crowd, which began a long series of attacks on police, administration buildings, beer-halls, and led, in turn, to police-counter attacks. Students fleeing the unrest in the townships poured into the ANC and PAC offices abroad to join these organisations, and it was post-1976 that the ANC was able to involve itself in a more visible and concerted effort to overthrow apartheid. They had the numbers in their ranks, and international interest piqued. The now iconographic photo of Hector Peterson, fatally wounded, being carried away from the scene of police shootings by Mbuyisa Makhubu and Hector's sister Antoinette was published in *The World* and publicised world-wide,²¹ and television images of the Soweto uprising became some of the first clear pictures broadcast to foreign audiences that illustrated the internal turmoil of South Africa.²² It was a public airing of the apartheid's regime apparent solution to handling the protest of students in its townships, and brought down international condemnation from many quarters.

Coverage of the police shootings of the Soweto students fell directly under the auspices of the Women's Section, as the issue of children affected by violence under apartheid was one of the concerns VOW had been conceived of to publicise to a broader international audience. As with the rest of the ANC organization, the Women's Secretariat was quick to jump on the Soweto shootings as a means through which to illustrate the wrongs of apartheid and the system they were fighting against. This also saw an increase of both male and female volunteers moving over the borders of South Africa and into Lusaka, where the Women's Secretariat was desperately in need of volunteers.

²¹ A Chronological History of the ANC. Hosted at:
http://www.ufh.ac.za/collections/Library/ANC_Materials/ANC-history.htm

²² Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 120.

II. 1976-1979

Garnering International Support and Creating an International Image

“Remember Soweto,” appears on the cover of the fourth quarter, 1976 edition of VOW, to the right of an image of two grieving figures. Inside are letters addressing the “Soweto Outrage” and another black and white drawing, this one of a woman holding a screaming child. Letters from the Federation of Japanese Women’s Organisations, the Soviet Women’s Committee, the Pan African Women’s Organization and the Women’s International Democratic Federation Secretariat express “deep sympathy” and profound “shock” over the “death of inhabitants of Soweto, among them women and children, at the hands of racist executioners.”²³ More telegrams appear from the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, the students of Springdale School in New Delhi, and the Committee of Bulgarian women.

VOW advertised a “new” look to the publication after the Soweto uprising, including a new masthead with a woman’s face shown in profile, wearing a striped kerchief in the shape of Africa, all stripes radiating outward from the southern tip of the continent. Many of the illustrations were still hand-drawn, but they are of a higher quality than those included in the pages of the first sporadic issues. The small staff of VOW felt that “to give VOW the touch of a woman, we need more photo’s [sic] in each page, we need to brightened up the IYC [International Year of the Child] column [sic].” It is interesting that giving the publication the “touch of a woman” was perceived by the staff to mean adding more pictures and “brightening” as opposed to more political content. The disparity of political content would become a critique of the publication by members of the Department of Information and Publicity at a later period. Differentiating VOW from the ANC’s other publications also appears to be an issue underlying this statement. The inclusion of articles relating to the

²³ SAHA Archives, Karis-Gerhart Collection: Political, ANC Journals. Vol 162 (VOW, fourth quarter 1976), 2.

experiences of children under apartheid was considered appropriate subject matter for a “feminine” publication, whereas militant mothers had not yet found their place in the pages of VOW.

The staff of VOW was always very small, and consisted of six to eight members of the Women’s Secretariat who volunteered to write articles and work on the layout of the publication. The details of the writing and printing of VOW were topics of the Women’s Secretariat meetings in Lusaka, held roughly every two weeks. At this time, the Women’s Secretariat, headed by Mophosho, was responsible for directing all of the women’s units in the external mission. The Secretariat was directly answerable to the Secretary General’s office of the ANC. VOW acted also as a means of communication with women’s units inside of the country, as the Secretariat called for the units to initiate activities in their areas of operation such as mobilising South African women to contribute politically, culturally and “otherwise” to the struggle, and assist and organise national days jointly with “the mother body,” or Women’s Secretariat. Among the Secretariat’s goals for the women’s units was for them to create and maintain contact with local women’s organisations, and report all activities to Women’s Secretariat at least every three months, including their financial reports.²⁴

By early 1979, as the number of subscribers was picking up and the staff continued to remain small and voluntary, the main discussions revolving around VOW were the venting of frustrations about the apparent inability of the volunteers to submit articles on deadline, which often put back the publication of the journal by anywhere from two to six weeks. Indeed, most of the correspondence from this period from overseas subscribers are not letters to the editor but letters asking why they have not received their requested issues -- whether

²⁴ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection. MCH01.5. Circular to All Women’s Units. 1979.

they were subscribers or had merely requested one review copy.²⁵ Lack of personnel to properly write and edit articles also, in at least one instance, was purported to cause a security risk to the operations of the ANC. The details of an interview conducted in the December 1977 issue was not “checked properly,”²⁶ though it is unclear who was ultimately responsible for checking these details.

The staff of VOW, as members of the Women’s Secretariat, were exclusively female. Florence Mophosho, Head of the Women’s Secretariat in 1979, was also the editor of VOW and present during the Secretariat meetings. From its printing in Lusaka, VOW was disseminated mainly through the units of the Women’s Section in the other missions in London, Maputo, Canada, and Dar-es-Salam. At the end of 1978, as the last of the funding provided by CUSO was running out, Florence Mophosho sent out a circular to “all our units of the women’s section” asking them to organize fundraisers for VOW. For their part, the women in Lusaka were organizing a “Jumble sale.” The women’s units were asked to “Kindly receive this task by giving it your maximum attention and response since we all know the significance of our propaganda to the international community. We shall be sending it inside the country too. which (sic) makes its continued production a matter of must.”²⁷ The funding problems of 1979 were finally solved through a donation of 60,000 Swedish Crowns, to be paid in two instalments, from the International Centre of the Swedish Labour Movement.²⁸

Because VOW’s aim mirrored the goal of the women’s units and Secretariat as a whole, it became more and more a way through which the Women’s Secretariat could champion its own goals and initiatives. The UN declared 1978 “International Anti-Apartheid Year,” and Secretariat President Mophosho asked that all women’s units initiate activities in

²⁵ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Lusaka. MCH22.1 Correspondence. 1978-1979.

²⁶ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Lusaka. MCH13.1 Meeting Minutes of Women’s Secretariat 09/01/1978.

²⁷ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Lusaka MCH01.5 Circular to all Women’s Units. 1979.

their areas of operation and mobilize “international support for our movement by highlighting the plight of our women, children, political prisoners and the entire down trodden population.”²⁹ The women of the ANC were also affiliate members of the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF), whose headquarters were out of the German Democratic Republic. As of 1978, Ruth Mompati represented the ANC Women’s Section in the WIDF Secretariat.³⁰ Articles on WIDF conferences, appeals, letters and several Declarations of Solidarity condemning apartheid were printed in VOW throughout this time period. Indeed, another of the aims of VOW after the UN-declared 1978 “International Anti-Apartheid Year” was to contribute to “the isolation of Apartheid South Africa, in keeping with the various adopted UN resolutions condemn-ing apartheid as a crime against humanity and calling for the total isolation of the Pretoria regime.”³¹ To achieve this aim, garnering a substantial international audience was vital.

This relationship between the ANC Women’s Secretariat and other women’s movements facilitated a sharing of publications and papers, and indeed, members of the ANC Women’s Section were also invited to speak at conferences abroad.³² The Women’s ANC Section in Great Britain would distribute copies of VOW to such organisations as the Socialist International Women in London. Organisations like the Danish Volunteer Service in Copenhagen, the Africa News Service in Durham, NC and the Overseas Education Fund for the League of Women Voters in Washington, DC, Yale University, and the University of California Women’s Centre requested copies or subscriptions to VOW during this period.³³ With the number of international organisations aware of the ANC Women’s Section and its

²⁸ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Lusaka MCH13.1 Meeting Minutes. 07/11/1979

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection. MCH14.2 “Production and Distribution of ‘Voice of Women’ (VOW).” Undated.

³² SAHA Archives. Karis-Gerhart Collection. Political, ANC Journals. Vol 162. (VOW No 3 1977). CUSO sponsored a Cross-Canada tour for two women to speak out in Windsor, Montreal, Ottawa, and other cities, about life under apartheid.

³³ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Lusaka MCH22.1 Correspondence. 1978-79.

journal, it's telling that the ANC's Department of Information and Publicity (DIP) did not appear to be overly interested in working with the Women's Section to coordinate information, indicating either a lack of central unity among the different bodies of the organisation or an indifference on the part of the DIP to the functioning of the Women's Secretariat. The absence of DIP interest in the ANCWL and its publication was remarked upon during one of the Women's Secretariat meetings in January of 1979 when it was noted that "the fact that it (VOW) is one of the movement's mouth-pieces, the meetings felt there should be more serious and meaningful coordination with the Publicity Dept. A joint meeting should be arranged."³⁴

This joint meeting did finally take place in late 1980, with a representative of the DIP, Thabo Mbeki, who would become Head of the DIP in April 1983, replacing DIP Secretary Sizakele Sigxashe. Until then, the staff of VOW was entirely in the hands of the Women's Secretariat, from the writing of articles to matters of printing and distribution.

The ANC's London office, at the end of 1979, was given a total of 2,000 copies of VOW to be distributed in London. ANC offices in Maputo, Luanda, Botswana, Swaziland, Dar-Es-Salaam, Morogoro and Lesotho received anywhere from 40 to 100 copies of VOW.³⁵ In a circular to the ANC offices in 1979, Administrative Secretary Joe Nhlanhla requested that each ANC office "supervise the distribution of the Voice of Women (VOW) in your area. This means that all present and future recipients of VOW in your area should be arranged through your offices [sic] regular supply of VOW." Fielding issues out to the offices and distributing them from there, instead of paying for postage to individual subscribers from Lusaka, was a much more "politically and financially" viable method for distribution.³⁶ The already overtaxed staff of VOW could then turn over the individual mailing to the various

³⁴ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Lusaka MCH13.1 Meeting Minutes of Women's Secretariat. 25/01/1979

³⁵ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Lusaka MCH 13.1 Meeting Minutes. 15/02/1979.

³⁶ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Lusaka MCH 22.5 Circular to all ANC Offices. 1979.

ANC offices, a solution which presented itself again in 1982 during a meeting in which it was advised that the bulk-mailing system to the ANC office in the USA should “resume” and the USA office would dispatch individual copies to USA subscribers. The US \$10 yearly subscription for VOW often barely covered the expense of sending the four issues a year overseas via airmail, let alone the cost of printing and production.³⁷

Articles for this period were still of interest primarily to an international audience and women already involved in the ANC’s external mission and South African exiles abroad. They include articles about forced removals, apartheid in the nursing profession, letters of “support” from various international organizations, deaths in detention, and increasingly, the addition of poetry in the pages of the publication was also employed by *Sechaba*. The cover images, however, become more militant. From mothers holding children or shown in profile, wearing kerchiefs (January 1974) and grieving female figures (fourth quarter 1976) we find in the second quarter of 1977 the image of a woman holding a gun, kneeling next to a dead youth, the woman’s fist upraised next to the slogan, “We Fight For Our Children.” In the third and fourth quarters of 1977, VOW repeats a second image, this of a woman wearing a black kerchief, slinging a gun over her shoulder, an image repeated again on the cover of the third quarter, 1978 issue. The second quarter of 1978 issue reproduces a photograph of militant youths, male and female, bearing sticks, mouths open wide, fists raised in the “black power” salute.³⁸ The image of the militant, gun-toting female revolutionary would soon be paired with the image of the woman holding a child. As yet, however, these two images had yet to be spliced together into the “mother of the nation” image that would, as of 1980, make up the new masthead of VOW.

³⁷ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection-Lusaka MCH13.2 Meeting Minutes. 02/09/1982.

³⁸ VOW, 1977-1979, available from the Mayibuye Archives Periodicals Collection. First quarter 1977 bears the popular image of a woman holding a child, as does the fourth quarter 1979 issue, this time reproduced in a photograph.

Chapter Two

From Protest and Solidarity to Armed Militancy

1980-1983

“The Women’s Section is not an end in itself. It is a weapon of struggle to be correctly used against all forms and levels of oppression, and in-equality in the interests of a victorious struggle of the people.”

- Statement made by ANC President O.R. Tambo at Luanda Women’s Conference, 1981. ¹

The decision to change the masthead for the publication of VOW to the image of a woman holding a long knife, a baby tied to her back, was made at the 2 June 1980 meeting of the Women’s Secretariat. There was some discussion about the issue of a new mast head over several meetings, but the details of why it was felt necessary to change the image are not given in the meeting minutes. The chosen image had first appeared on page six of the last issue of VOW in 1979. This change in the masthead signified the first push toward expanding not only the publication’s audience, but also the expansion of its subject matter, from primarily international education to the education of women inside of South Africa, with a particular emphasis on teaching women how to organize themselves into more militant groups inside the country. ²

The image of the female revolutionary -- paired with weapon and child -- was certainly not an unknown image within the African liberation movements in the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1975, *Sechaba* ran a photo of the Women’s Detachment of FRELIMO (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique), as part of a larger issue dedicated to celebrating August 9th, South African Women’s Day. The Women’s Detachment is shown parading down a street, carrying rifles and dressed in military uniforms.³ The second quarter 1980 issue of VOW featured an editorial about

¹ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection –Lusaka. MCH22.5 “Report on the Voice of Women For Publications Workshop Lusaka.” 1983.

² Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH13.1 Meeting Minutes. 1980

³ *Sechaba* (Vol 9 No 8/9 Aug-Sep 1975), 16. Available at <http://www.disa.nu.ac.za>

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² Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH13.1 Meeting Minutes. 1980

³ *Sechaba* (Vol 9 No 8/9 Aug-Sep 1975), 16. Available at <http://www.disa.nu.ac.za>

VOW masthead prior to 1980
SAHA Archives
Archives. Karis-Gerhard Collection:
Political, ANC Journals. Folder 162
(VOW No 4 1976), 1

Illustration used as the basis for
the new masthead of VOW. SAHA
Karis-Gerhart Collection:
Political, ANC Journals. Folder 162
(VOW No 4 1979), 6

Masthead post-1980 with rifle
Mayibuye Archives.
Periodicals Collection.
(VOW No 4 1984), 1

Masthead with knife
Mayibuye Archives.
Periodicals Collection.
(VOW No 2 & 3 1985), 1

Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, and pictured a "Zimbabwe Woman Freedom Fighter" holding a gun and wearing masculine clothing.⁴ A 1982 article in VOW on "The Cunene Women's Resistance" opened with the line, "In war-torn Southern Angola heroic women with babies on their backs and guns in their hands, fight side by side with their men in repelling boer aggression."⁵ Depictions of women involved in the militant wings of other African liberation movements would become increasingly popular during the 1980s in the pages of VOW, as this same image was also becoming popular in so many other movements.

In practice, this merging of the masculine image of a revolutionary fighter and the female body often proved to be a problematic one, thus the specific image chosen for VOW, of a recognizably feminine woman signified by child, head scarf, and earring. In her work, *Does Khaki Become You?* Cynthia Enloe explores this image of the armed female revolutionary and the rhetoric around it and asserts, "revolutionary warfare, on the one hand, can transform women's role and sense of self-worth, while, on the other hand, sustain the social order that in the past has ensured the reproduction of the next generation."⁶ In more formalized armies, the issue of women's attire was one of the chief points of contention, because dress is such a potent social signifier of gender:

If women are called upon to soldier, should the government issue them uniforms that declare their 'femininity', at the risk of emphasizing their sexual otherness in an essentially masculine institution? Or should women soldiers wear uniforms designed to hide their sexual identity, to make them blend in with men, thus sacrificing whatever privilege males get from being soldiers and whatever protection women are supposed to get from their 'vulnerability'?'⁷

There were two solutions to subverting this problem of overtly "masculinizing" the female body in the masthead of VOW. The image chosen for the masthead is a woman attired in a headscarf, with one visible hoop earring. She wears a sleeveless shirt that may or may

⁴ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No 2 1980), 6

⁵ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No 3 1982), 8

⁶ Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You?*, 166

⁷ Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You?*, 119

not be military camouflage. The substitution of a long knife for a rifle is an interesting one, though the original image used in the illustration was a woman carrying a rifle with a bayonet affixed to the end. The artist who rendered the image chose to give the bayonet the appearance of a knife, omitting the barrel of the rifle. The knife may be considered a less militant signifier of a female about to commit violence, or, like the spear, imply a return to traditional weapons used against an enemy. With a baby on her back and knife in her hand, it could be argued she was going to use the knife as a tool and not a weapon. Yet, at the end of 1983, the woman on the masthead replaces her knife with the less ambiguous rifle – without a bayonet -- for a relatively short time. She would exchange the rifle again for her knife in 1985.

The original image of a woman with a weapon/tool, however, is also echoed in another image reproduced in VOW of a woman holding a digging pick, a baby tied her back with a blanket in an early 1983 issue.⁸ Pairing a woman with a baby -- a traditionally feminine occupation -- and holding a weapon, Enloe maintains, often makes it easier for the newly appointed government -- post liberation -- to ask women to simply put down their weapons once the threat has passed and resume their previous socially acceptable roles as mothers and caregivers. As a masthead for VOW, then, this image acted to reinforce a woman's "traditional" role of mother, as opposed to challenging or interrogating it. As Enloe notes, the image of a man with rifle and baby is absent from the catalogue of images used in the propaganda of liberation movements. There is no question that, post-liberation, the male figure will put down *his* rifle and take up rearing of children so that women may enter into more visible political roles.

Women involved in the Algerian liberation force (FLN) during the Algerian war of 1954-62 were also portrayed in just this way to the international media: women as active

⁸ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection (VOW No 1 1983), 7.

combatants against the French, guns and children in hand. However, most women inside of the FLN liberation army were regulated to supportive non-combat roles as “moral support for resistance fighters, information liaison, food suppliers, shelter, and aid to families.”⁹

The act of physical reproduction itself has also become viewed as a political action performed by women in Palestine. Women who produced fighters for the resistance were sometimes discussed as having a “military womb.”¹⁰ The idea of breeding fighters for the resistance became a popular way of expressing dissent against the apartheid regime as well during the 1980s, and sometimes, as Isak Niehaus points out, could result in the exploitation of women by men who identified themselves as ‘freedom fighters’ and considered it their “duty” to assist women in the production of more fighters, a campaign called ‘building soldiers,’ in which Comrades forced girls to attend meetings at night and proceeded to impregnate them.¹¹

As early as 1977, VOW includes “a timely warning” insert in their first quarter issue of that year in which a Soweto mother, identified by the initials “M.D.” is purported to have said:

When Soweto students were found guilty by the magistrate for the demonstrations of June 16th, 1976, they replied to him, ‘We are not guilty of any of the charges. The police can kill us, give us electric shocks and torture us, which you condone, but remember whenever you see a pregnant black mother, you must know that the child about to be born is the very student that has been killed by the police: he has come back to mother earth and from then on, our black mothers will give birth to twins, triplets and we are going to come back much stronger than we are now.’¹²

This theme of reproduction as a political tactic was becoming more popular and persistent in spite of, or perhaps in reaction to, the apartheid regime’s Family Planning

⁹ Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You?*, 166-168

¹⁰ Calloway, “Survival and Support: Women’s Forms of Political Action”, 221.

¹¹ Isak Niehaus, “Towards a Dubious Liberation: Masculinity, Sexuality and Power in South African Lowveld Schools, 1953-1999.” *Journal of South African Studies*. (Vol 23 No. 3 September 2000), 399. For more on the concept of ‘breeding soldiers’, and further references, see also Peter Delius and Clive Glaser, “Sexual Socialisation in South Africa: a Historical Perspective,” *African Studies*. (61:1, 2000), 49

¹² SAHA Archives. Karis-Gerhart Collection: Political, ANC Journals. Folder 162. (VOW No. 1 1977), 12

Initiative directed specifically at black African women, an initiative that VOW would eventually begin to attack in earnest in 1983-84, which will be explored in the next chapter.

For now, VOW was just beginning to promote a more militant yet recognizably feminine and nurturing image of the female revolutionary, turning the role of woman-as-mother into a politically volatile one. The role of motherhood also served to unite the culturally diverse women in VOW's audience with a common experience. A 1981 issue of VOW's main article title is "Women's Unity Crucial," which asserts that "...the current situation demands all of us women and mothers, that we must leave no stone unturned in organising the unorganised from the grass root level..."¹³ This headline is echoed again in a 1983 issue, where the headline is "WOMEN MUST UNITE."¹⁴ Women were asked to use their "influence as wives and mothers to make people aware of the situation and draw them into the struggle."¹⁵ O.R. Tambo, in an interview headlining the second quarter the 1980 issue of VOW, as his opening remark says, "I would like, first of all, through the columns of VOW, to greet the heroic mothers and daughters of our movement." The Women's Program, "Dawn Breaks", made its first broadcast on Radio Freedom out of Lusaka, Zambia on 13th March 1980, and opened with an appeal to "the women of South Africa, all mothers, all of you wives and sisters of our nation... We shall be calling on you as we have done before to take up your own gun wherever you are."¹⁶ These words would open every subsequent program, a program advertised in VOW as airing every Thursday at 9.30 pm South African time. Though this synthesis of the use of the term mother/woman certainly speaks to the importance of a women's roles as the creators of children, the blending of the terms can also "partly be read in the context of the vernacular African languages where the word for adult woman and the word for mother are the same and in the context of African societies, where

¹³ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW. Unspecified quarter, 1981), 1

¹⁴ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW. No. 5, 1983), 1

¹⁵ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW. No. 6, 1983), 3

the upbringing of children is more widely shared between households than is the case in white areas.”¹⁷

This invocation of women’s unity by drawing on their shared experiences as mothers was not, in itself, a new conception in the history of the rhetoric of resistance of the ANC’s Women’s League, though there have been “qualitative differences in the portrayal of the mother in different periods.” The ANC Women’s League, still an affiliate of the Federation of South African Women in the 1950s, urged women to come together against the pass laws during that period by drawing upon this same language with such statements as: “As wives and mothers we condemn the pass laws and all they imply.” Thus, the experience of being a wife and mother was one that could cross the apartheid-imposed colour bar.¹⁸ Gaitskell and Unterhalter also point out that women’s status as mothers in the 1950s was also being undermined through the introduction of passes for women because African women, as mothers, believed they deserved more humane treatment than the brutality meted out to African men.¹⁹

The conception of motherhood changed with the prominence of the youth in the 1976 uprisings. Though the role of the youth in these new protests brought back the rhetoric of motherhood, it was a conception of motherhood subtly altered from that of the 1950s. Instead of outrage expressed at the disrespect for the title of mother, the mother figure became a symbol of the rebirth of the liberation movement because:

after the long periods in which resistance had lain dormant, repressed, it was now being reborn, and this sense too might have inspired so many poems around the theme of motherhood. The images of motherhood suggest strength and suffering and sadness. The mother is an inspiration to the daughter, but it is the daughter who is the protector of the mother and in that guise and in her decision to join the struggle and build a new society becomes the mother to the future unborn generations.²⁰

¹⁶ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH12.4 “A statement prepared for the opening of a women’s progrnne [sic] on Radio Freedom – Lusaka.” March 1980.

¹⁷ Gaitskell and Unterhalter, “Mother of the Nation,” in *Women-Nation-State*, 72

¹⁸ Gaitskell and Unterhalter, “Mothers of the Nation,” in *Women-Nation-State*, 69

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, 70-71

This change in the rhetoric, from outrage against the brutalisation of women because of their status as mothers, to a discussion of female power ascribed to women because of their ability to bear children, has been ascribed to the increasing number of women employed as wage earners in South Africa, from 23 percent in 1950 to 33 percent in 1980, whereas in 1950 a “sizeable number of women who were mothers, both black and white, were dependent on the wages of male workers,” while 1980 saw the number of female-headed households increase. According to the 1980 census, women headed 30 percent of households in urban areas, 47 percent in the bantustan towns, and 59 percent of all households in the bantustan rural areas.²¹ As the adult in the household completely responsible for the welfare of those under their care, without recourse through the channels of men, women began to step forward in increasing numbers to join trade unions and women’s organizations where they acted as the voice, and often sole supporter of, their households.

Women who bore children and were not personally involved in the militant struggle were, then, included among the ranks of the patriotic in VOW’s pages due to their relationship to the fighter, a relationship usually invoked after the fighter’s death or detention. Thus, a woman “may never have been politically active, but her maternal sacrifice is exalted as a supreme political act.”²² Sarah Mosolodi gives a send-off to her son on the front cover of one issue of VOW that reads, “Go well my son. I love you. I am proud of you for you are to die for your people. You must know the struggle will not end even after your death.”²³ Among the obituaries in another issue the year before, Ahmat Motswaledit, “mother of Elias serving life imprisonment on Robben Island,” is included among two other women, Rose Mbele, a “tireless organiser” who “participated in all the mass demonstrations lauched (sic) by the ANC,” and a “young militant,” Mpho Sekgomotso Dombo who “played her role very

²¹ Gaitskell and Unterhalter, “Mothers of the Nation,” in Yuval-Davis and F. Anthias (eds) *Woman-Nation-State*, 72

²² Calloway, “Survival and Support: Women’s forms of Political Action,” 221.

well in the student, youth and women section activities.” Ahmat Motswaledi, however, is not praised for her abilities as an organizer or militant, but because “She belongs to scores of our unsung heroines. It was due to her understanding of her son’s commitment to the struggle that she took care of his children when their mother was kept in detention.”²⁴

In 1981, ANC activist and Women’s League member Gertrude Shope became a member of the ANC’s National Executive Committee, and formed her own committee of women that would make up the ANC Women’s Section, a group of women who were to meet to oversee the output of Women’s League propaganda, and write up the year’s agenda as to issues to be discussed, and campaigns undertaken. Shope and her committee would be the drafters of the programme of action for each year.²⁵

Behind the scenes, the staff of VOW itself was working on transforming the publication from its primary role as educator of an international audience to the horrors of apartheid to a publication that actively seeking to help women inside of the country to organize into increasingly militant roles. This change in policy coincided with a greater involvement of the ANC’s Department of Information and Publicity. In a document titled “ANC Information Policy” written within the organization, a Department of Information and Publicity report dated for 1982 says, “It would be fair and an objective assessment to rate our information and propaganda effort impact inside the country from poor to very poor, or weak to very weak.” The “ANC Information Policy” report in which this quote is written goes on to say that the above quote “would probably be a reasonable assessment applied also to our propaganda efforts outside the country.”²⁶ Apparently, this problem regarding the output of sufficient propaganda went even higher than the DIP, to the ANC’s National Executive Committee (NEC) itself, as a 1983 report on “Sechaba and External Publicity” insisted that in

²³ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW. No. 4, 1983), 1.

²⁴ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW. No. 1 1982), 8.

²⁵ Johannes Rantete. *The African National Congress and the Negotiated Settlement in South Africa*. (Pretoria: J.L. van Shaik Publishers, 1998), 38-39.

order to be more effective, the “DIP needs to constantly knock at the door of the NEC so that Information and Publicity become an integral part of the NEC meetings and deliberations.”²⁷

The DIP was, regardless, moving toward taking greater control of the ANC’s propaganda publications in 1982 and 1983, including the publication of VOW. This shift began as early as 1980, when a “comrade V.” was delegated by the DIP to be the “Internal Committee for purposes of liaising between the two bodies [the DIP and staff of VOW] on issues of internal [sic]. He was therefore to be a member of the Editorial Board [of VOW] automatically, as VOW is one of the internal publications.” Before publication, VOW would also have to pass through the hands of “Comrade Thabo,” who “as a member of the Political Commission had to advise on matters of policy from the point of view of the NEC.”²⁸

Yet these new additions to the formerly all-female staff of the journal appeared to have been solicited by the women themselves, who discussed in a January 1979 meeting their feeling that “there should be more serious and meaningful coordination with the Publicity Dept... A joint meeting should be arranged.”²⁹ On February 2nd, 1980 at a staff meeting, it was noted that “VOW to be incooperated [sic] with DIP,” and on February 8th “Comrade Thabo”³⁰ was “to be asked to attend the meetings to discuss VOW so that he can contribute to the planning of the articles.”³¹ Further involvement of the DIP was reiterated again at an August 1980 meeting in which it was noted in the meeting minutes that, “The Secretariat should once more raise the problem of VOW with the D.I.P.”³² A month later, at the September meeting of the staff, the response to this request appeared to have been granted with the addition of the two new members to the 4-6 person staff of VOW. Comrades Thabo

²⁶ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH12.3 “ANC Information Policy.” Undated.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH13.1 Meeting Minutes. 08/09/1980

²⁹ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH13.1 Meeting Minutes. 25/01/1979

³⁰ Likely Thabo Mbeki, who was acting as the political secretary to the presidency at this time, and would rise to the head of the DIP in Lusaka on April 7th, 1983. University of Fort Hare. ANC Archives. ANC Lusaka Mission. Box 53. DIP 1981-1983. Document: “Information and Publicity Departmental Structure.”

³¹ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH13.1 Meeting Minutes. 08/02/1980.

³² Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH13.1 Meeting Minutes. 27/08/1980.

and “V.”³³ were not to be responsible for the penning of articles or layout, but acted as advisors and final editors of the publication. In some cases, this could mean that “Comrade T.” would “rewrite the articles” if they were found to be unsatisfactory upon his inspection.³⁴ Both Thabo and “V.” “had to see the material before it went to the publishers [sic].”³⁵

In a letter dated March 4th, 1982 “Thabo” wrote to “Flo” [Florence Mophosho, then editor of VOW], and though she is the editor at this time, he makes comments on the publication’s final changes. He was critical of the articles and said they “are of the general type that Mayibuye carries. I do not think it is possible to mobilise women on this basis,” and “in some of the articles we report back to the people what they know already -- things they have read long before we received the News Briefings. This would make sense for an international readership which has no access to material on the situation in South Africa, but I should think not for people at home.” He ended the letter with “Appreciating the problems you are experiencing in raising the standard of VOW, I thought I should communicate these thoughts to you in the hope that you might find them useful.”³⁶

As Thabo’s letter illustrates, the incorporation of a member of the NEC and DIP coincided with increased interest in putting out a version of VOW aimed solely at women inside of South Africa. There appeared to be a conflicting view of who VOW’s audience was throughout the 1980-83 period as the publication began to move from focusing on a educating a purely international audience about apartheid to directing articles toward women still inside South Africa. Increased involvement of NEC and DIP members in the publication of VOW also coincided with the ANC’s proposed strategy of a full-scale “people’s war” that would effectively combat the “total strategy” campaign the apartheid government formulated

³³ Likely to be Victor Matlou, responsible for “internal propaganda” in the DIP structure. Fort Hare. ANC Lusaka Mission. Box 53. DIP 1981-1983. Document: “Information and Publicity Departmental Structure.”

³⁴ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH13.1 Meeting Minutes. 08/09/1980.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH22.5 Correspondence. 04/03/1982. Letter from “Thabo” to “Comrade Flo.”

throughout the 1979-1984 period. "Total strategy" was the response of the government to what it believed would become a "total onslaught" on structures from within and without by violent revolutionaries. Defeating these revolutionaries, it was believed, would require a method involving "total strategy" that "combin[ed] effective security measures with reformist policies aimed at removing the grievances that revolutionaries could exploit" and also "an attempt to re-constitute the means of domination in terms favourable to the ruling groups."³⁷ In response, the ANC's "people's war," would involve a more aggressive organization and education of "the masses" for the overthrow of apartheid. VOW, as a publication of the ANC's Women's Section, was rapidly being altered in order to service these ends more effectively. The transition of the publication from international education to militant female recruitment into the ranks of MK as cadres or supporting members was never a complete transition for VOW, as it would remain a publication whose primary staff consisted of female volunteers living in exile who had little direct contact with women inside of the country. Short of taking over the publication and finding an entirely new staff willing to work on a volunteer basis, the DIP and NEC representatives were forced to work with the foundation of the publication already set into place.

At the February 8th meeting of 1980, the editorial board of VOW was "to discuss with the Internal the financing of the internal issues of VOW by them, so that the Secretariat can then produce 2 issues -- for internal and external." By the 2nd June meeting of 1980, it was asserted that indeed, the magazine would be producing two formats, "for Internal and International - with little differences where there are needs to change approach."³⁸ The production of two publications would have been the neatest solution to the problem of the dual audience divide. Unfortunately, this attempt at the production of two different formats

³⁷ Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 123

³⁸ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH13.1 Meeting Minutes. 02/06/1980

for VOW apparently fell through, as expressed in a 1983 report on the Voice of Women after a publications workshop in Lusaka:

after the Conference the Secretariat set to discuss the possibilities of having two (2) issues of VOW. However, this possibility was immediately made impossible by lack of manpower. Thus presently we still have only one issue for both internal and external audiences.³⁹

As the existence of two different formats for VOW proved to be unfeasible, the solution was to begin to alter the existing content of the publication to cater to an internal audience. Again, these changes from educating an external international audience to working on organising women inside of the country coincided with the addition of advisors from the DIP and NEC. Analyses of VOW's articles and format in 1983 were critiqued in at least two documents. "The Report of the Consultative meeting held with the Maputo Political Department [sic] and representatives of editorial boards of VOW, Mayibuye, Dawn and Forward," and the "Report on Voice of Women for Publications Workshop." In both documents, the critiques of the publication are made by assessing how well VOW achieves the aims of propaganda set down by the DIP in the "ANC Information Policy" document. The "Overall Objective of Propaganda Output" included such goals as:

To project the ANC internally and internationally as the alter-nate power in SA, the main vehicle for change in our country and with a programme that embodies the aspirations of our people... To mobilise the masses and to channel their grievances and anger into politically oriented and effective action... To prepare the masses continuously for support of the armed struggle generally, and as the struggle develops to raise their level of consciousness so that they see our cadres as their hope and liberation leading them to support, protect and actively assist our units... To win cadres for the underground units of MK... To weaken the enemy and diminish political and material support both internally and internationally... To win political support for our struggle internationally... To counter enemy propaganda... To build up the morale of our supporters.⁴⁰

Along those lines, VOW was analyzed as to how effectively it carried out the goals of the DIP's "overall objective of propaganda output." It was pointed out in the report of the

³⁹ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH22.5 "Report on the Voice of Women for Publications Workshop." 1983.

⁴⁰ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH12.3 "ANC Information Policy." Undated.

consultative meeting in 1982/83 that “the political content of Vow was analyse[sic] as very weak, and thus cannot serve to mobilise the women at home. Political issues are not tackle[sic] in a proper way eg. arcle [sic] on prostitution on the 3rd quarter 1981,” and “It does not carry articles on women’s involvement in various aspects of our struggle. eg. workers, domestic workers, etc. It was clarified to the house that Vow being quarterly is limited to carrying such articles time and again but an attempt is being made to cover the different fields.”⁴¹ Most of the fourteen points outlined as being “problems” in the content of VOW actually had to do with its *lack* of articles directed at organising women inside of the country, including critiques of the language used. The staff was asked to “simplify” the language of the articles, since the publication was not put out in any African languages. VOW, it was stated, should be an “educator,” and “on every issue produced we should examine if it is worth risking carrying home and passing it to other people. Vow should explain matters like how to form a cell, how to fight against enemy violence, etc.”⁴² At the time this report was written, 6000 copies of VOW were being produced 4 to 6 times a year, over three times the amount produced in 1979. 4000 of these copies were sent inside South Africa, and 2000 sent outside South Africa, “including South African Women in exile, international, national and regional youth and church organisations NGO and about 700 readers spread throughout the world. From these we only have about 50 subscribers.”⁴³

During a publications workshop in Lusaka from the 8th-13th of June, 1983, the editors of the ANC publications *Mayibuye*, *Forward*, and *Worker's Unity* were asked to read their reports to the answer to the question: “Who is the audience? Who are we addressing ourselves to in these journals?” The representatives from VOW [unnamed in the report]

explained how VOW tries to reach the women in the bantustans -- the approach in VOW is to reach them through the more literate urban women who are resettled in the bantustans. VOW points out to the resettled women that their task is not just to resist

⁴¹ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH22.5

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

resettlement, but to organise women in the bantustans once they are removed to these areas. In reality then VOW is reaching a very narrow strata of women. VOW must therefore make greater effort to produce illustrated articles and cartoon-type articles.⁴⁴

When the representatives of VOW were asked if they provided tools for these women to organise themselves, it was recorded that,

The only feedback so far had been of a very general nature of a general improvement of VOW... It was suggested in language that VOW should watch out for terms such as “basic healthcare and “cell work” which had very little meaning for the majority of women at home.⁴⁵

The staff itself also produced a 8th June 1983 “Report on Voice of Women for Publications Workshop” and acknowledged all of the problems above that the writers of the Consultative meeting report had outlined as issues that needed to be addressed and rectified in their future issues. In this new report, “rough guidelines” of the new approach to VOW were drawn up by the staff and committed to paper for the report. The original intent of VOW, to educate “the international community of the plight and disabilities being suffered by Black women,” had now radically changed to an aim consistent with the other publications of the ANC:

1. Vow is an ANC women’s journal to mobilise women into the ANC and MK [...] It is therefore necessary for us to reflect all LEVELS of the struggle, [lines missing] stressing the importance primarily of underground political and military struggle to overthrow the racist regime.⁴⁶

It was now particularly stressed that VOW was and *ANC* journal:

2. As an ANC journal, Vow must reflect women’s struggle on all FRONTS. This means taking into account all civic struggles, religious struggles, women as youth, woemn [sic] workers etc. The aim here is not to simply duplicate the work of democratic legal bodies at home but to take women a step forward -- showing the necessary connection between those struggles and our overall political struggle for the seizure of power form the racists...⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH12.3

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection – Lusaka. MCH22.5 “Report on Voice of Women For Publications Workshop.” 1983.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

The particular “female-angle” of the journal, though noted as “most” important among its guidelines, was listed as the third and final point:

3. Finally, and most importantly for our specific purposes, Vow is an ANC Women’s journal, this means that our task is always to “find the women’s angle” in every issue we [sic] tackle.... We fight for our rights as woemn [sic] within the context of national liberation.⁴⁸

What these new guidelines signified was the beginning of the evolution of the publication from a journal created to gain support from an international audience to a recruiting mechanism for the ANC and MK. From the beginning, of course, the publication involved disseminating information about the ANC, and provoking women specifically to stand up to apartheid in a myriad of different ways. Yet now, the emphasis was on recruiting all women inside the country and propelling them into the ranks of the militant. The first point in the new guidelines is an emphasis on the “importance primarily of underground political and military struggle to overthrow the racist regime;” the second, to forward women’s work in all other aspects of the struggle, civic, religious, etc.

To achieve this, VOW would need more than a woman with a weapon on its masthead. As the 1980s continued, VOW’s pages would become filled with more illustrations, more examples of women organising in unions and protests, more profiles on female militants, and obituaries celebrating those who had died for the struggle. Yet VOW, as the voice of the ANC Women’s Section was still used to address issues the Women’s Section itself believed to be issues of importance facing women in their everyday lives. In 1984, VOW became the mouthpiece of just such a campaign against the Apartheid regime’s Family Planning Initiative directed at black African women, with particular attention to alerting its readers to the dangers of Depo Provera, a campaign which will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁴⁸ Ibid

Chapter Three

Politics Versus Practicality: the Contraception Campaign

1983-1984

“According to the apartheid myth of ‘swart gevaar’ (black danger), the whites of our country...are in danger of being swamped or completely annihilated by the black majority. White women are therefore told to constantly produce more white babies, cannon-fodder for the racist army. Black women, on the other hand, are told to “plan smaller families for a happier future” There can be NO happier future for us in the apartheid system.

“The racist ‘family planning system [sic] which is aimed at the systematic reduction of the black population, is therefore one of our major targets of attack, in 1984 and the future.”

--VOW, No. 1, 1984¹

The national Family Planning Initiative in South Africa began in 1974 with the aim of “reducing the population growth rate of the African population, as opposed to the white population.”² Official reasons given for the necessity of this population control program primarily had to do with trumped-up fears of overpopulation resulting in the depletion of natural resources that would supposedly ravage the environment of South Africa and make it unliveable.³

Controlling a state’s population, as Barbara Brown points out, consists not only of control over the fertility of women, but control of mortality rates and immigration laws. A higher number of “whites” inside South Africa would result in a higher ratio of whites to blacks, as the white population of South Africa has always been in the minority, and gaining a larger pool of white skilled labourers would mean black labourers would not have to be trained to perform the same jobs.⁴ The state’s backing of a family planning program

¹ University of Durban-Westville Documentation Centre. Phyllis Naidoo Collection. Box 11, File 178: Women.

² Barbara Klugman, “The Politics of Contraception in South Africa.” in *Women’s Studies Int. Forum*, (Vol. 13 No. 3 1990), 262

³ Quoted in Klugman, “The Politics of Contraception in South Africa,” 262.

⁴ Barbara B. Brown, “Facing the ‘Black Peril’: The Politics of Population Control in South Africa.” *Journal of South African Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3., April 1987. For a discussion of similar minority “white” population fears of an increasing “black” population in Rhodesia, see Amy Kaler, “Fertility Running Wild: Elite

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⁴ Barbara B. Brown, “Facing the ‘Black Peril’: The Politics of Population Control in South Africa.” *Journal of South African Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, April 1987. For a discussion of similar minority “white” population fears of an increasing “black” population in Rhodesia, see Amy Kaler, “Fertility Running Wild: Elite

coincided with rising unemployment among the country's black population created by access to "labour-saving technology" that resulted in "production which increasingly relies on machinery to do the work..."⁵ The 1970s, as already pointed out, were also a time of increasing militancy and resistance against the apartheid regime. The family planning initiative, as a state-funded institution that sought to put controls on African fertility, became a justified target for political attack.⁶

In late 1982, when the Women's Secretariat in Lusaka began to discuss their interest in launching a campaign against the injectible drug Depo Provera, their original intent was not to attack all contraceptive services, or particularly the family planning initiative. Depo Provera itself was to be the only contraceptive under attack in the pages of VOW and via correspondence and reports with other international organizations. Concerns around the use of Depo Provera primarily centred on the side effects of the drug, which could include bleeding and sterility. It was also possible for this drug to be administered without a patient's knowledge. Throughout the course of the rhetoric of VOW during the 1983-84 period regarding contraception, it became clear that the campaign was not, as first intimated, exclusively limited to the use of Depo Provera, but instead shifted to become an attack on the state's program of family planning in general. In this way, the Women's Section, while taking up an issue of particular concern to the health of -- particularly black African -- women inside South Africa, altered the scope of its campaign in order to more broadly encompass the "produce more cadres for the cause" slogan widely popular in not only the ANC but other liberation movements. This alignment with broader ANC policy appears to have been undertaken consciously, as Gertrude Shope, then head of the Women's Section, articulates in a letter:

Perceptions of the Need for Birth Control in White-Ruled Rhodesia," in *Contraception Across Cultures*. (Berg: Oxford and New York, 2000), p 81-102

⁵ Ibid, 261

⁶ Carol E. Kaufman, "Reproductive Control in Apartheid South Africa." *Population Studies*. (54: 2000), 109

We came to the conclusion that for the campaign to be more political and in line with the ANC policy we must launch a campaign against the whole regime's strategy of family planning and we bring up the usage of all dangerous contraceptives and highlight DP since it is the most dangerous and widely used.⁷

This anti-contraception stance paired neatly with the emphasis of women's roles in the movement as mothers. Even female members of MK were not immune from the mantle of motherhood as their defining characteristic. As one MK cadre put it, "I'm a guerrilla because I'm a mother."⁸ The public face of VOW and the rhetoric against contraception in its pages, however, did not reflect the more complex situation many women within the movement, particularly the ANC in exile, were negotiating during this period. But, as will be shown in this chapter, celebrating the mother revolutionary on paper was much easier than living out that role in practice.

At the August 23, 1982 meeting of the staff of VOW, one of the members, "CB" had just returned from a conference in Brussels, Belgium and felt it necessary to speak to the committee about what she had heard about the use of Depo-Provera.⁹ At this time, the use of Depo-Provera was banned in many "first world" countries, including the United States and Britain, due to concerns about the safety of the drug, which acted to prevent conception for a period of up to three months. An October 16, 1983 article in London's *The Observer* included among the collection of meeting minutes, reports that a Texas rapist was to be given an injection of Depo-Provera to lower his sex drive, in lieu of a 99 year prison sentence.¹⁰ Using a contraceptive drug on women in South Africa that was purportedly used in a "first world" country to "castrate" rapists evoked a similar comparison to the way in which the drug would "castrate" a woman's ability to conceive, and the drug's dubious alternate use was

⁷ University of Fort Hare. ANC-Lusaka Mission. Vol 102. Women's Section Correspondence. April-Aug 1983. Letter to Comrade Lusica Raadsohellers, Coordinator AAHN Women's Group.

⁸ Cock, *Colonels and Cadres*, interview with MK member Thandi Modise. Modise was prime example of the militant mother, and her name comes up at least three times in the pages of VOW throughout the 1980s. Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW. No 2 1981), p 1. (VOW 16 December "special issue," 1982) 4. (VOW No 1 1984), p 5.

⁹ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection - Political. MCH13.2 Meeting Minutes. 23/08/1982

commented upon in VOW as a sort of “chemical castration” that “should leave us no doubt as to it’s [sic] possible effects on women’s reproductive organs.”¹¹

The event that touched off the staff of VOW’s interest in combating the family planning program through discussion of the dangers of Depo-Provera was an advertisement in the South African women’s magazine *Fairlady*, brought to the attention of the staff by “CB” upon her return from the Brussels conference. The advertisement consists of a picture of a white woman pouring tea in the kitchen while a black woman cuts a melon in the background. The advertising copy read:

Family Planning is my baby too! Last time my domestic had an unplanned pregnancy I let her work until the end because I thought the money would help her. But I couldn’t help feeling that it was conscience money. I felt guilty for not having told her about family planning sooner. Today I know as an employer, my duties don’t stop at paying my domestic a good salary. Or providing her with food, clothing and a roof over her head. They go beyond that to a sincere interest in her family life. That’s why I discuss family planning with her and take her to the nearest clinic where she can get all the guidance she needs. Apart from helping her and her family towards a happier planned life, I have also helped myself with a domestic who is more efficient and devoted because her mind is free of family problems. So if you have a domestic - or even a gardener - remember, family planning is your baby too!¹²

This description of the article made up a part of a document prepared by the Women’s Section titled, *Proposals for the Campaign Against the Racist Regimes’ [sic] Strategy of “Family Planning” With Highlights Being the Usage of Depo-Provera*. The August 23 VOW meeting makes note that both the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the UN should be approached to assist in exposing “this genocide.” The meeting minutes also record the resolution of the participants that “there should be a mobilisation of women for the protest on the usage of this in-jection. Also there should be a mobilisation of the medical people, doctors, nurses etc, to support, to expose the use of this [Depo-Provera] in South Africa” and

¹⁰ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection - Political. MCH14.1 Meeting Minutes. *The Observer* newsclipping, 1983.

¹¹ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No 1 1984)

¹² Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection - Political. MCH14.1 Meeting Minutes. 1980-83. “Proposals for the Campaign Against the Racist Regimes’[sic] Strategy of ‘Family Planning’ with Highlights Being the Usage of Depo-Provera.” Undated.

“it would be good to have a statement from women inside the country, on this question.

Statements should come from the working women and domestic servants.”¹³

The second issue of VOW, 1983 makes the first explicit denunciation of the family planning program in the statement of a woman identified as Khosi Mbatha, who is described as having left South Africa after her release from prison. Her front-page article served VOW on many different fronts. Mbatha was a woman, a mother of seven, who spoke against family planning, and encouraged the use of armed force to overthrow apartheid. On family planning, Mbatha says:

I know the pain of being forced to control your family. The latest name they use is “family planning”. They tell us to “plan” our family, to have less babies while whites are told to have more and more “Botha babies”. In the sixties they said any white mother with more than two children would be supported by the State.¹⁴

They try to convince us that we are starving because we have too many children and breed “irresponsibly”. What a cruel bluff [sic] We know why we starve - it is because of unemployment, bantustans, disease and not enough pay at work.¹⁵

In a 1983 VOW article titled, “Fight for these Rights!” the “Right to Mother-hood” is listed second, after the “Right to work.” The right to motherhood included fighting for maternity and abortion rights, where the state’s family planning initiative was mocked for its claim that though women had no right to abortion, they

must take the “advice” they [the state] offer in the so-called ‘Family Planning’ clinics set up in factories and townships. It is not “kind advice” that they give us in clinics. Instead we are given dangerous injectible contraceptives like Depo Provera, which result in death and sterility for many of us, who are not even aware of the effects of

¹³ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection - Political. MCH13.2 Meeting Minutes. 23/08/1982

¹⁴ A reference to government “allowances” paid out to “single mothers, widows and married women whose family income is insufficient to provide a decent standard of living.” Such allotments were purportedly paid out to women of all races, but African women received very few, and the amounts they were allotted were proportionately smaller to those granted to white women. See Brown, “Facing the ‘Black Peril’: The Politics of Population Control in South Africa,” 267.

¹⁵ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW, No. 2 1983).

these drugs when they are given to us.¹⁶ All women must demand the right to choose whether to have a child or not!¹⁷

On September 5th, 1983 the Secretary of the Women's Section sent out a circular to announce that "The Women's Secretariat is preparing to launch a campaign on the abuse of family planning by the use of dangerous drugs like Depo Provera, the injection used as a contraceptive by the racist regime in our country."¹⁸ A flyer from the "Anti Apartheid Bewegeing Nederland," an anti-apartheid organization in Holland, reported on the dangers and inequalities inherent in South African's state-sponsored family planning program and says that the "ANC-WS [Women's Section] is fighting for a free and democratis [sic] South Africa in which public health will reflect the needs of the population and will serve them and family planning will be a means of greater liberation instead of intensified suppression."¹⁹ The Women's Secretariat, then, did achieve a measure of its goal to educate a wider audience about the family planning program and its place in the apartheid regime's strategy of oppression. South Africa's Family Planning Initiative became a new issue around which to organize an international outcry against the inequalities of the apartheid state.²⁰

ANC President O.R. Tambo declared 1984 the "Year of the Women," making the ANC's "special task" that year to "organise and mobilise our womenfolk into a powerful,

¹⁶ There were reports that many African women were given injections of Depo Provera directly after giving birth to their children, often without knowing what the injection consisted of, and without consent. Coercion in the workplace also appeared to be involved, where at least one factory required its female workers to sign a statement that should they fall pregnant within 12 months, their "service could be terminated immediately." Factories would sometimes provide access to or set up clinics that would provide "pills and injections" for women and condoms for men. See Klugman, "The Politics of Contraception in South Africa," 265.

¹⁷ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW, No. 6 1983)

¹⁸ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection - Political. MCH14.1 Circular from the ANC Women's Secretariat. September 1983.

¹⁹ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection - Political. MCH14.1 Apartheid Bewegeing Nederland Flyer. 1984.

²⁰ Indeed, the ANC's fear and suspicion of the state's intent regarding the Family Planning Initiative and its "genocidal" intentions were not unfounded or wholly exaggerated. As discussed in chapter three of Julian Brown's MA Dissertation, "*The End of The Future*": *the Development of the South African Chemical and Biological Weapons Research Programme, 1981-1991*, the development of contraceptives which could be administered to black Africans without their knowledge "in the beer or in the maize or in the vaccinations..." (pp 95) was one of the development interests of Project Coast, the state-funded chemical and biological weapons programme headed by Dr. Wouter Basson in the 1980s. Though the production of such a contraceptive in such a short time period was considered highly unfeasible and the project ultimately produced no results, the ability of such a far-fetched programme to procure funding from the state is telling of the state's keen interest in seeing

united and active force for revolutionary change... no longer should it be that a woman's place is in the kitchen. In our beleaguered country the woman's place is in the battlefield of the struggle."²¹ Indeed, the ANC Women's Section had achieved a measure of success by joining with other anti-Apartheid organizations in their campaign against South Africa's Family Planning Association. In 1984, that organization was suspended from the International Parenthood and Family Planning Association.²²

Barbara Klugman, in her study of attitudes around contraception during the 1980s in a sample of urban women, did conclude that all of her informants were aware that the "government wants blacks to have fewer children so that there will be fewer blacks." However, the women interviewed did not link radio, television, and magazine advertisements for contraceptive services as being a part of the government's national family planning campaign. Klugman believes that this implied that women's decisions to use contraceptives were not primarily affected by their suspicion of the government's program, but negotiated on a more individual needs basis.²³

The Women's Secretariat's campaign against family planning, while certainly pursued because of the dangerous nature of Depo-Provera and the situation of the family planning initiative as a political target, also appears to speak to the same model of African womanhood discussed in Chapter Two, the image of the true patriotic African woman existing as both militant fighter and nurturing mother. Women were continually portrayed in the pages of VOW as mothers *and* militant activists or mothers *of* militant activists. Though a woman's role was no longer seen as being sufficiently political should she remain solely in the kitchen, the idealized image of the African woman was still that of a mother. Indeed, one young man, in discussing the sexual coercion of girls that occurred during "nocturnal

the successful production of an invisible contraceptive that could "control" the fertility of specifically black African women.

²¹ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 1 1984)

²² Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 1 1984)

meetings and all-night vigils” held by young men, some who “asserted that it was their duty to father more soldiers to replace those that had fallen in battle” said, “We explained to them [the girls] that we are being reduced by the police and they should not use contraception and so prevent the soldiers who might come and help us in the future...”²⁴

What many of these young men appeared not to take into account was the girls’ ability to take care of these children in a time of increased unemployment. Even more striking is the apparent oversight of a mother’s economic and health concerns by the staff of VOW, who comment on maternity and abortion rights, albeit briefly, and recognize the “genocidal” nature of the government’s family planning program, but without offering women viable strategies for providing for such large families. One unnamed woman, writing to the Reader’s Forum in 1983, denounced family planning measures on religious grounds:

Our grandparents used to have more than 12 children and they managed to maintain and educate them, despite the fact that they earned very little. In the old days people were not educated and they knew nothing about family planning, except that if a child was born, it was regarded as a gift from God, and it was therefore a God-given committal for parents to be thankful and bring up that child.²⁵

The tone of this writer’s letter feels somewhat nostalgic, and as Klugman points out, does not reflect “on the implications of uncontrolled childbirth for women.”²⁶ This appears to be a shortcoming on the part of many of those encouraging women to shun contraception and bear a large number of children during this period, including the staff producing VOW.

Yet here, we reach the interesting ambiguity in the public and private interests of the women involved in the Women’s Section and production of the rhetoric of VOW. While encouraging women at home to shun family planning, Gertrude Shope received, in August of 1983, a letter from “our women in Angola” who were requesting contraceptives. Shope

²³ Klugman, “The Politics of Contraception in South Africa,” 267.

²⁴ Peter Delius and Clive Glaser, “Sexual Socialisation in South Africa: a Historical Perspective,” *African Studies* (61. No. 1, 2000), 49

²⁵ Quoted in Klugman, “The Politics of Contraception in South Africa,” 268

²⁶ *Ibid.*

writes to the Secretary of the Medical Committee of the ANC, Manto Tshabalala²⁷, and asks, “your Committee identifies a sponsor for a continuous supply of the contraceptives.”²⁸

The type of contraceptives sent is left unspecified. Shope writes that “as a temporary measure they will receive a few” from the Women’s Section. Distribution of contraceptives was apparently viewed as being the purview of the Medical Committee and not the Women’s Section. This contestation between the public stance of the Women’s Section on contraception and the private, practical concerns of the women involved in the exiled movement also reflects the clash of ANC policy with Women’s Section concerns and campaigns. The Women’s Section was not an autonomous body separate from the ANC. Though it retained its own president and organizing structure, the Women’s League was ultimately answerable to the National Executive Committee. In addition, members from the DIP, as noted in the last chapter, now had the final say on the content of the articles that made up VOW. Requests for ANC funding and further staffing went directly through ANC departments. As of 1983, the staff of VOW consisted of Gertrude Shope, head of the Women’s Section; Agnes Msimang, Mittah Seperepere, Florence Mophosho, Ray Simons, Doreen Motshabi, Mavivi Manzini, Pauline Mashaba and Mavis Nhlapo. Three more women were listed as “assisting in the production of VOW and other duties”: Marion Sparg, Lucy Thandeni and Rhoda Njanana. Njanana is indicated as working part-time on the women’s radio program, *Dawn Breaks*.²⁹ Shope wrote to Andrew Masondo in the Department of Manpower Development for the ANC and requested two additional staff members to assist with filing and typing, with a particular request for a “trained journalist for VOW.”³⁰

²⁷ Tshabalala will, post-1994, become the Minister of Health for South Africa

²⁸ University of Fort Hare. ANC-Lusaka Mission. Box 102. Women’s Section Correspondence. April-Aug 1983. Letter to Manto Tshabalala.

²⁹ University of Fort Hare. ANC-Lusaka Mission. Box 102 Women’s Section Correspondence. April-Aug 1983. Letter to General Andrew Masondo, Dept. of Manpower Development, ANC. 1983.

³⁰ Ibid.

Though much of VOW's funding was provided by external international organizations petitioned by the Women's Section, these funds appeared to have been given over to the account of the ANC Treasurer General, and not retained by the Women's Section itself.³¹ Gertrude Shope, in a 5th December 1983 letter to the treasurer general, submits "our requirements for the coming year," which include a car for the Women's Secretariat, a car for VOW, a bus for school going children in Botswana and Mazimbu, air tickets to cover "internal contacts, International speaking engagements including National Women's Committee meetings," a maintenance budget for the four vehicles they requested, a cosmetics allowance, and baby food, milk, cereals, soap and irons.³²

As a mouthpiece of the Women's Section, VOW reflected this wider campaign waged by the Women's Section while remaining committed to the new goal of the publication articulated in the 1980-82 period, that of encouraging women to mobilise into politically minded groups who would act as members of the ANC's People's Army. As 1984 was lauded as the ANC's "Year of the Women," the articles of VOW increasingly encouraged women to become "revolutionary cadres."³³

As the campaign against the family planning initiative shows, however, the ANC Women's Section would remain linked to international organizations, particularly international women's organizations and anti-apartheid organizations, and continued to report on women's roles in revolutionary movements in other countries. They would also occasionally print messages of solidarity from these other movements. In this regard, the Secretariat was maintaining its ties with an international audience capable of providing

³¹ University of Fort Hare. ANC-Lusaka Mission. Box 102 Women's Section Correspondence. Jan-June 1984. Letter from Gertrude Shope to Jennifer Davis, Executive Director of the Africa Fund, acknowledges receipt of US \$3500 from the Africa Fund as a donation to VOW. Shope indicates that she has attached receipt no. 0704 from the treasurer-general, "whom we have deposited the money to." 05/12/1983.

³² University of Fort Hare. ANC-Lusaka Mission. Box 102. Women's Section Correspondence. Sep-Dec. 1983. Letter from Gertrude Shope to Treasurer General. 05/12/1983.

³³ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 1 1984)

funding and conference opportunities on women's issues such as contraception while contributing to the ANC's wider goal of attempting to reach women inside of the country and mobilising them into productive units that would assist in making the country ungovernable. This balancing act, however, would become more difficult to maintain in the latter part of the 1980s, when the ANC's broader cry to "take the struggle to the white areas" would bleed over into the pages of VOW, and articles on women's involvement in MK would become more prolific. Putting women's issues on the agenda was certainly pertinent at international conferences, but as violent resistance against apartheid mounted in the 1980s and the DIP took greater interest in VOW, its relative autonomy during the latter part of the 1970s began to be undermined by the necessity for the inclusion of political cell work and protest organisation expressed by the DIP.

As it stood, the Women's Charter reproduced in the second issue of 1984 of VOW does not include among its aims access to safe contraception, legal abortion, or even the securing of maternity rights (which were commented upon in a second article, but still do not figure in the aims of the Women's Section as a whole). The aims expressed in the Women's Charter are for the removal of laws of physical restriction, the right to vote, and equal rights with men, with the final listed aim being "to strive for permanent peace throughout the world."³⁴ Striving for peace was still regarded as a primarily feminine activity, as expressed in a VOW interview with Mittah Seperepere, who asserted that women need special mobilisation in the struggle for peace because "We are the ones who bring life into this world and it is our responsibility to ensure that life is protected and cared for."³⁵

And peace, of course, was not believed to be possible until the end of apartheid, the downfall of which was perceived to arrive only through the mass mobilization and organisation of people inside of the country. In the "People's War" of the latter 1980s,

³⁴ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 2 1984)

African women – and, increasingly, white women -- were to be called upon to take “the struggle to the white areas,”³⁶ through equal measures violence and resistance.

³⁵ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 4 1983)

³⁶ ANC Leaflet, “Take the Struggle to the White Areas.” 1985. Available at:
<http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/pr/1980s/pr850600.html>

Chapter Four “We Must Take the Lead”¹: Advance, Attack and Reform

1985-1989

The balance of forces has tilted considerably in favour of the democratic forces. This is due to our joint efforts as men and women. The racist colonial regime has lost control of the situation and has resorted to the state of emergency. Yet despite brutal repression, the country becomes more and more ungovernable. This achievement can be likened to a newly-born baby. We must ensure that it grows stronger until it matures into freedom.²

On South African Women’s Day, 9 August 1985, Florence Mophosho, dedicated ANC activist, former president of the Women’s Section, VOW editor and elected member of the NEC, died in Lusaka. She had since stepped down from her former position as head of the Women’s Section in 1981³, which was then taken by Gertrude Shope. However, Mophosho remained a strong presence inside the ANC and its Women’s Section until her death. She had been re-elected to the NEC in June 1985. In her obituary in *Sechaba* in November of that year, she was praised for the way in which she had

combined in an excellent way the struggle for women’s rights with the national liberation struggle, without losing the immediate perspective that the main content of our struggle at the present moment is the national liberation of the Africans and all blacks, and the social emancipation of all South Africans – black and white – and all other problems fall into place in that context. Not that women’s liberation has to wait for that; the struggle for women’s liberation, today and now, is part of the overall struggle. There is no contradiction in this. The two reinforce each other...⁴

Yet the journal of such importance to Mophosho, who ANC President Oliver Tambo recalled seeing a number of times “sitting down... working tirelessly to produce VOW... I saw her in Lilanda – Zambia – with a typewriter in her room typing her assignments,”⁵ was losing the balance between “women’s liberation” and “national liberation” that Mophosho herself was lauded to have maintained so diligently. Women’s international conferences and

¹ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 1, 1986), 1

² Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 2&3 1985), 4

³ University of Fort Hare. ANC Archives. Box 104. Correspondence 1981-1982. Florence Mophosho’s letter of resignation due to “my health failing.” 1981.

⁴ *Sechaba*, November 1985. Available at: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/people/fmophosho.html> or <http://www.disa.nu.ac.za>

solidarity with women involved in other liberation movements would continue to make up the pages of VOW during the latter 1980s, but there was a noticeable shift in tone from 1985-86, from education and mobilisation to mass action and militancy, which would shift back again to more closely follow the original purpose of the journal – education of an international audience to the suffering of women and children under apartheid – from 1987 to 1989 as negotiations between the ANC and National Party government progressed.

Mophosho's death in 1985 was also the same year that saw the end of the UN declared Decade of Women, and the beginning of a general state of emergency inside of South Africa. While the ANC spent a great deal of resources on the recruitment, training and deployment of MK revolutionaries, the National Party was, arguably, divested of its power through the divestment of foreign capital. By 1985-86, economic sanctions imposed by the United States, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the European Union and Japan had begun to take their toll on the South African economy. Three hundred and nine foreign companies withdrew from South Africa between 1984 and 1989.⁶ Popular anti-apartheid movements inside of these countries, and regular petitions to the United Nations from liberation groups including the ANC, created an isolated South Africa that either had to exist self-sufficiently in an increasingly globalizing economy or enact drastic reforms that would ultimately change the face of the South African government. Though the ANC's "terrorist attacks" numbered 291 in 1988, 247 in 1987, and 230 in 1986, the loss of life incurred during these attacks from 1985 to 1988 numbered only 144 people. According to government statistics at the time, only 22.8% of these attacks were aimed at people or institutions related to the government, while 27.2% were targeted at police, military and judiciary targets,⁷ meaning nearly 60% of the 291 in attacks in 1988 were on state-controlled institutions and personnel.

⁵ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 2&3 1985), 9

⁶ Switzer and Adhikari, *South Africa's Resistance Press*, 9

⁷ University of Durban-Westville. Phyllis Naidoo Collection. Box 11. Folder 177 Violence (2). Document Title: Info '89 HAP.

None of these attacks appeared to have permanently or even severely damaged the basic functioning of the state. The real target that could topple the National Party government – the economy through which its forces were funded – was never effectively attacked with saboteur’s bombs. MK’s strategy, articulated in 1964 by Nelson Mandela in his Rivonia testimony, was that the sabotage of these installations within the country would “scare away capital” and “in the long run be a heavy drain on the economic life of the country, thus compelling the voters of the country to reconsider their position.” However, because of the government’s censorship of printed and televised media, the number, means, and manner of terrorist activities were left largely underreported and under-publicized.⁸

VOW’s content during this period increasingly urged women to “swell the ranks of the combat groups which are daily confronting the soldiers and police”⁹ and a “call to us women as well to join MK and deliver the final blows to our enemy.”¹⁰ One 1985 editorial published in VOW reiterates the Radio Freedom speech and leaflets urging women to take “the war to the white areas,” effectively altering the rhetoric slightly to focus on the role of women:

It is an open secret that the majority of the white population is armed. Therefore to us mothers who have been employed in the white areas, we need to take heed of this opportunity to sneak in their bedrooms and offices to get guns and ammunition...¹¹

A nearly verbatim call was given over Radio Freedom to a general audience during the same year:

The weapons are there in white houses. Each white house has a gun or two hidden somewhere for use against us. Our mothers work in their kitchens, we work in their gardens. Let us deliberately go out to look for these weapons in these houses. It is now a matter of life and death. Let us find these weapons for use against the enemy.¹²

⁸Thomas, *The Diplomacy of Liberation*, 9-10.

⁹Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. VOW (No 2 & 3 1985), 4.

¹⁰Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. VOW (No 1 1986), 1

¹¹Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. VOW (No 4, 1985), 2

¹²University of California, Berkeley. Selected Radio Freedom Broadcasts (1985) From, “Revolutionary Violence” available at: http://www.polisci.Berkley.edu/courses/coursePages/ps146/radio_freedom.html>

By the end of 1985, VOW had become much more focused and organized around its primary goals of mobilising women into effective units, whether those women's units were involved in boycotts, joining trade unions, or joining MK. The Secretariat went from producing four issues a year of VOW to six¹³, and at the end of 1985, Shope's Women's Section prepared a document outlining all of the articles to be included in the six 1986 issues of the publication, illustrating a programme of preparation and organization that was seriously lacking in the publication's early years. The propaganda put out by the Secretariat, as outlined by the Women's Section Committee, was to serve a dual purpose, "mobilising South African women of all races into active struggle against Apartheid and all its evils as well as mobilise international support for our struggle."¹⁴

This call to women of all races, though intimated in previous issues,¹⁵ particularly when expressing solidarity with women in other liberation struggles, became more explicit in 1985-86. Instead of Thandi Modise, it is Marion Sparg's image on the cover of one 1986 issue of VOW, which covered the treason trial of "one of the few white women who have come to grasp the real situation in our country."¹⁶ Sparg was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison for planting limpet mines which exploded in John Vorster square police station. She identified herself as a member of MK and the ANC and said she regarded herself "not as a traitor but as a soldier and patriot."¹⁷ Before infiltrating herself back into the country, Sparg

¹³ Though issues were often "combined" into longer dual issues numbered "3 & 4" or "5 & 6," giving the illusion that more individual issues were circulated, when in actuality, the quarterly nature of VOW was still the format largely adhered to during this period. "Special Issues" were still occasionally put out, particularly for August 9th, South African Women's Day.

¹⁴ University of Fort Hare. ANC Archives. ANC Lusaka Mission. Box 103 Women's Section Correspondence 1985-86. Document "Programme for 1986 – Women's Section."

¹⁵ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No 2 1984), 10. There is a small text box at the bottom of this page titled "A call to white women" that urges "democratic white women in our country to join us in our struggle to rid our country of this fascist war machine and the apartheid system it protects and defends." It also included an article titled "Why Die For Apartheid?" which appealed to "white women" to stand against the regime in defence of their own sons who were dying as members of the "SA Death Forces."

¹⁶ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. VOW (No. 5 & 6 1986), 1

¹⁷ Ibid

was also listed as among those in the Women's Secretariat in 1983 involved in "assisting the production of VOW and other duties."¹⁸

This same issue of VOW that holds up Sparg as a "committed revolutionary soldier" also commemorates "25 Years of Umkhonto we Sizwe." Another article calls upon women to "strengthen combat units" and reminded women that

as we intensify our offensive against the enemy, we must extend our struggle to the white areas, directing our blows on enemy personnel and strategic military, economic and administrative installations. Women domestic workers who work in the white areas can be very effective in this regard. They have the capability to identify homes of racist officials who are giving orders to shoot, rape and murder us indiscriminately in the townships. They can even locate places where their employers keep guns and pass this information to MK and combat units, or they themselves use them against the enemy.¹⁹

Yet another 1986 issue of VOW called on police women to resign to "save yourselves from perishing with apartheid."²⁰ Another article warned farmers' wives to "beware" as "it is high time that white farmers' wives along the borders of South Africa realised the myth of the invincibility of the white oppressor army has been exploded"²¹ and

Farmers' wives already integrated into the SADF should realise that they are not defending themselves and their interests, but those of a small group which insists on remaining in power. They should fight for the broader interests of the people, black and white.²²

The increasing militancy of the language of VOW also mirrored the escalating violence in the townships inside South Africa during this period. From October 1984, both the army and police were present inside the townships. The militarization of the state would also reach its apex during this period.²³ The ANC had become progressively more visible inside the country, through ANC songs, flags, and the presence of underground ANC

¹⁸ University of Fort Hare. ANC Archives. ANC Mission-Lusaka. Box 102 Women's Section Correspondence April-August 1983. Letter to Andrew Masondo, Dept. of Manpower Development. From Gertrude Shope. Undated.

¹⁹ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 5 & 6 1986), 3

²⁰ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 4 1986), 7

²¹ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 1 1986), 6

²² Ibid.

²³ Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 130-31

literature inside the country popularized within the country by the United Democratic Front (UDF).

The UDF was an anti-apartheid organisation formed in 1983 with the objective of coordinating itself around the opposition of the government's partial reforms, with particular emphasis on protesting the "Tricameral Parliament." The Parliament "provided racially segregated representation in central government for coloureds and Indians as well as white South Africans," which would exclude the voices of the majority of the population – black Africans. The UDF's launch in 1983 was attended by "over five hundred anti-apartheid organisations across the country." The UDF played an active role in mobilising boycotts and protests inside the country, and promoted the visibility of the ANC underground inside the country.²⁴ Active ANC members such as Frances Baard and Frank Chikane gave speeches during the UDF launch and rallies.²⁵ The relationship between the UDF and the ANC was a close one. By 1987, members of the UDF were meeting with ANC representatives in London to discuss "How exactly are we going to take over?"²⁶

The answer to this question repeatedly came back to calls for the mobilisation of the masses inside the country. While the state began tentative reforms and parleying with the ANC in exile during 1986, VOW and other ANC publications, particularly *Dawn*, continued to push the rhetoric of intensifying violence against the state in order to make it "ungovernable." The reforms lauded by the National Party government were attacked in VOW as being sham reforms "accompanied with brute and racist violence," that continued even as parties inside South Africa began showing interest in negotiating with the ANC in exile.²⁷ In 1986, a Commonwealth delegation arrived in South Africa to speak with the

²⁴ Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front*, 2-3

²⁵ Ibid, 1 and 57

²⁶ Ibid, 207

²⁷ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW 1985 No. 4), 3

National Party government about the state of the country, but was “undermined by South African raids on supposed ANC bases in Harare, Lusaka and Gaborone.”²⁸

At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Women’s Section on 20 September 1987, a report was given to the members from a “Women and MK” group from the Internal Commission of the ANC highlighting the need for an acceleration of the “movement of women into the country for them to work underground internally.” The report asserted that “the recruitment of women into Mk [sic] has to be stepped up, especially rural and working women.” The recommendation that “all able-bodied women should go for military training” was also made. Yet the issue of women in MK and recruiting more women for the purposes of the furthering of the aims of the ANC was not the only one on the programme of the Women’s Section for 1987. It was stressed that “contraception of both male and female cadres has to be more strictly enforced, especially in the camps.”²⁹ A copy of the report mentioned in the meeting minutes states that “we still need ‘sex education’ for our MK cadres” because female cadres still found that they were being treated as “sex objects,” and “in the past, [women] have been the pleasure of officers in command.” It was asserted that the Women’s Section itself “should assume recruitment, training and deployment as its top priority task.”³⁰ Other issues of significant importance to women’s health were raised at the September meeting as well, including abortion. Inside of South Africa, abortion rights were still severely restricted. The Women’s Secretariat, however, stated that

we appreciate the need for the NEC to protect the movement, but we must take the lead as women are the sufferers and we should stress the importance of flexibility on the issues. The medical personnel should be left to use their discretion as each situation demands.³¹

²⁸ Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 135-136.

²⁹ University of Fort Hare. ANC-Lusaka Mission. Box 3 ANC Women’s Section, 1978-1980. Meeting Minutes of the NWECA Meeting of 20/09/87. It appears this document was misfiled.

³⁰ University of Fort Hare. Mittah Seperepere Papers. Box 114. Women’s Second National Consultative Conference. September 1-6 1987

³¹ University of Fort Hare. ANC-Lusaka Mission. Box 3 ANC Women’s Section, 1978-1980. Meeting Minutes of the NWECA Meeting of 20/09/1987.

Despite these discussions, it appears that attacks on Family Planning were still being made within the Women's Section, if no longer being afforded space in the pages of VOW. A request was made at the meeting that a letter be drafted to "Dr Barnard about the genocide perpetrated in the process of Physical Population control."³² Other concerns discussed at this meeting were the necessity for improving education and encouraging the publication of anthologies written by women and for children, as well as countering "traditional" roles of women portrayed by the media. Bleaching creams were given as an example of popular products to campaign against which were considered "degrading" in their portrayal of black women. Increasing displeasure over the "matter of male cadres who make more than one woman pregnant" and did not provide adequate support for their subsequent offspring was also expressed.³³ Yet these latter concerns were never taken up publicly in the forum of VOW. These issues may have been perceived to be of interest mainly to women involved in the movement in exile, though that does not explain the absence of further protest against the Family Planning Initiative. An explanation for these silences lies in the position of VOW as an ANC publication in a time of the increasing visibility and militancy of the organisation. A sample of headlines for one 1986 issue of VOW urged: "Women Unite Crush State Terror," "Passes Must Go Now," "Defeat Pretoria Death Squads," and "Working Women Join MK."³⁴ This particular issue was only eight pages long. VOW did not have enough space during this time to both push ANC party policy and forward sensitive women's issues like contraception and abortion, aspects of women's health that the ANC's NEC would not formulate any clear stance on until the ANC gained its political party status post-1990. However, the broad range of concerns expressed during the Secretariat meetings showed that though the Secretariat felt it must give its publication over to focus primarily on national liberation, women in exile were still participating in the forwarding of issues pertaining specifically to women.

³² Ibid.

At the 1987 conference of the Women's Section, the goals of the organisation would alter yet again. Even the two or three particularly militant passages or articles present in the VOW issues of 1985-86 would fade away just as the articles on Depo Provera and Family Planning disappeared after 1984. Instead, VOW continued to report on international women's movements and rallies, and each year, as it had before, celebrated South African Women's day, 9th August.³⁵ The dampening down of the violent tone coincided with increasing talks between the ANC and National Party government, though as one writer would later describe it, these were as yet, "talks... about whether to talk... about talks."³⁶

Over the course of 1988-89, this shift in tactics, from militancy to mass protest, would also be reflected in the united efforts of the UDF and COSATU, who allied to form the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), an alliance of organisations responsible for coordinating mass protest inside of the country with the intent of dismantling apartheid segregation.³⁷ At the same time, discussions between the ANC and the National Party government commenced in earnest. Discussions took place between both ANC leaders abroad and the National Intelligence Service. Talks also resumed between Nelson Mandela and Minister of Justice Koebe Coetzee, which led to further meetings between Mandela and "a team of officials" from the NP government.³⁸ Recognizing the advantages of negotiations, arguments were made within the ANC that

Circumstances arise which force revolutionary movements to compromise to avoid being weakened or defeated... Compromises made to maintain an organisation's mass base, because of the greater strength of the enemy on a particular terrain, or because it becomes impossible to continue a particular form of struggle indefinitely are necessary.³⁹

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW 1986 No. 4), 1-8

³⁵ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW 1987 No. 4), 1-8

³⁶ Patti Waldmeir as quoted in Seekings, *The UDF: History of the United Democratic Front*, 227.

³⁷ Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 136.

³⁸ Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front*, 241.

³⁹ Quoted in Rantete, *The African National Congress and the Negotiated Settlement in South Africa*, 137.

Unfortunately, a search of several archives throughout the country failed to turn up any issues of VOW for the 1988 period. At least one explanation for this occurs in the first issue of VOW in 1989 in which an apology is printed on page two of the publication “for the non-appearance of VOW 3rd and 4th quarters. This was due to technical [sic] problems beyond our control,”⁴⁰ implying that in all likelihood there were only two issues produced during this year. Reasons for the non-appearance of the issues are not alluded to again.

The reappearance of VOW for 1989 was headlined by one of the most pressing problems faced by the ANC in its talks with the NP government, the resolution of increasing violence in Natal between the ANC and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) members. Even in 1989, VOW charged that “the present Inkatha under the leadership of Gatsha Buthelezi is a creation and a tool of the racist regime.”⁴¹ This was well before the *Weekly Mail* published evidence of the NP government’s funding of the IFP and other organisations opposed to the ANC during a time when the NP government was talking of a peaceful resolution with the ANC.⁴² VOW’s front page article charged the NP with recruiting members of the Inkatha Youth Brigade into the ranks of army and security police within the townships. As it was an article published for VOW, there was a section predictably detailing the plight of children within the troubled areas. Women were reported to be reacting against the violence by staging protests and “reinforcing the defence units that have been formed to protect the people against the enemy.”⁴³ The definition of “enemy” had expanded to include both NP government officials and “puppets” to those members of a black political party seen to be colluding with the NP government.

As previously noted, 1989 saw a de-emphasis on armed, militant women’s struggle in the pages of VOW, compared with 1985-86. The first issue of 1989, aside from reporting on

⁴⁰ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 1 1989), 2

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Rantete, *The African National Congress and the Negotiated Settlement in South Africa*, 102.

⁴³ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 1 1989), 1

the violence in Natal, had an article detailing the plight of women in detention, forced removals, an interview with VOW contributor Ray Simons on the occasion of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Federation of South African Women, and an extract from a publication titled, “Women of the whole World” that detailed violence perpetrated upon the Palestinian people by the Israeli state, calling for an international conference to resolve the “middle East conflict.”⁴⁴

The second issue of 1989 makes another plea to white women to become involved in organising

against all social ills that have gnawed into the marrow of society. They have to become teachers, re-educate their loved ones by cleansing the racist tendencies in them. They have to be selfless parents prepared to save themselves and everybody else around them from the ghostly possibilities of an unstoppable bloodbath.⁴⁵

A violent solution to apartheid was no longer “inevitable,” but was still, and would as yet remain for some time, a possible means to the end of the institution of apartheid.

Unity among women of all races was stressed again in this second issue of the year, and a call for “social values, positive anti-racist and anti-war positions” which “are a recipe for a free and peaceful nation” was made in one editorial.⁴⁶ Another article in this issue reported on the meeting of “ANC women and White women from inside South Africa” in Harare on the 19-21st of April that year, made possible by the Institute for Democratic Alternative in South Africa (IDASA). It was an opportunity for the delegation of ANC women to answer pressing questions from the Afrikaner women, who were reportedly pleased to learn “that the ANC women were anxiously yearning for an end to the flow of blood in South Africa.” It was also an opportunity for both sides to discuss the differences and commonalities in the two groups’ perceptions of themselves as women. The unnamed author of the article states that

⁴⁴ Ibid, 1-7

⁴⁵ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No. 2 1989), 2

⁴⁶ Ibid, 2

the legitimacy of the entire ANC delegation was membership in the ANC and not for example, a husband. We uphold our womanness and reckon with it without reference to men. Thus when we appeal to white women as mothers... it is because in our view a demand for equality is not a denial or negation of our role as mothers. Some from a patriarchal Afrikaaner culture might *conceivably* look differently on themselves as women particularly when they begin the process of rebelling against many of its basic tenets.⁴⁷ [original emphasis]

The underlying implication in that statement appears to be that the author came away with the impression that it would be more difficult for women's emancipation or independent action among the Afrikaner women because they effectively defined their status as women by their status as wives, an area of difference the author felt of enough significance to note. A small inset on the next page titled, "Liberate Yourself as a Woman" makes an uncomfortable balancing act by calling upon women to liberate themselves from their status as perpetual minors while accepting their roles as a wives and mothers. It ends by asserting that

The call is liberate yourself but, guard against woman chauvinism. A Woman's [sic] liberation means that in her self liberation, she should engulf the needs of the family and all those who are around her.⁴⁸

This small inset penned by an author going by the name of R.V. Nzo⁴⁹ adhered not only to the ANC party line of liberation from apartheid before women's liberation, but implied that women's liberation was in fact synonymous with liberation from apartheid. Defining a woman not only by her role as a mother, but also as a wife, is particularly interesting and problematic when read alongside the insight of the author above who saw such differences in the ways in which the Afrikaner women defined themselves as wives and women. R.V. Nzo located women's definitions of themselves and their liberation as one which would "engulf the needs of the family." The family referred to would conceivably include a father figure. However, as most black women inside of the country had been relocated to rural areas and separated from men moving into employment and hostel

⁴⁷ Ibid, 5

accommodation in the cities, a great many women would be acting as household heads without the immediate presence of a patriarchal family head. A woman's status would be more clearly defined not in opposition to a man's, but in her role as child bearer and provider, the "mother of the nation," image as discussed in Chapter Two.

The most startling article in this issue was written in a narrative style by an author identified as Euphemia Mlambo, which followed directly after R.V. Nzo's inset about what it was to be a liberated woman. This article, titled "Ghost of a Manchild," detailed the emotionally and sexually unsatisfying relationship of a woman named Ethel who lived in a township with her husband and three daughters. She was consoled by her sister not to seek a divorce as divorce "had its own problems." She was offered a scholarship for a six-month intensive course in hospital administration in England, and resolved to go, leaving her children and husband behind. Oddly, the ultimate moment of confrontation between her husband, who has resolved not to let her go, and herself is missing from the text, which ended in mid-sentence and moved on:

When Themba [Ethel's husband] did not like something, he always had that >>lost boy look>>. [sic] This made Ethel feel The [sic] three months passed soon and Ethel was due to leave home. During her absence from home the family kept regular correspondence.⁵⁰

Ethel's decision to go abroad and further her education compelled her husband to write her romantic letters, and allowed her children to improve their relationship with their father. The message of Nzo's inset is reiterated: a woman could "liberate" or, in this case, educate herself and still maintain or even improve the lives of her husband and children. Such a neat assertion of the benefits of women's education without risk to the dissolution of the patriarchal family was no doubt a less politically volatile and divisive stance to take than one advocating a challenge to or the dismantling of the male dominated household. It is

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Likely Regina Nzo, wife of ANC Secretary General Alfred Nzo.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 6-7

significant that the actual moment of confrontation between the husband and wife portrayed in the narrative is missing.

The silence regarding the nature of that confrontation mirrored the silence surrounding the issue of men who perpetrated violence upon their spouses, a subject never raised in the pages of VOW, but addressed by the Women's Section in correspondence to other ANC missions. Gertrude Shope sent out a letter to the ANC Directorate regarding a report by the Women's Regional Committee in the Morogoro area regarding "Wife/Girlfriend/Child battering." Shope wrote

Reports continue to reach us that male comrades beat their girlfriends and wives up and that no disciplinary action has been taken. Instead, we are told, the attitude of even some senior people has sometimes been that it is traditional for this kind of thing to happen.⁵¹

The occasion of her letter was on the reported battering of a child whose injuries had to be stitched. Shope appealed to

you comrades to always see to it that appropriate action is taken whenever such acts are committed by any of our cadres. In this way we can start to protect the rights of our women and children as fellow-human beings. We would therefore come closer to our idea of a free and democratic, non-sexist South Africa.⁵²

Teboho Maitse, in her interviews in 1993/94 with women who were members of or associated with the ANC Women's League, found that many women both recognized and, significantly, apologized for "the fact that their views included an inherent critique of the nationalist movement." One woman, identified as 'Claudia', asserted that

being a member of any liberation movement does not necessarily protect women from male violence. In fact, the struggle encourages the violence because women do not have any forum to discuss anything that directly affects them, because in the first place women's organisations are not independent of the male-dominated organisations. Women's organisations have to further the aims of the overall struggle for national liberation, rather than women's liberation. So women do not discuss issues that affect them because that is not what the struggle is about.⁵³

⁵¹ Mayibuye Archives. ANC Collection. ANC-Lusaka. Box 61. Folder 4. Letter to "The Directorate, Mazimbu, Morogoro," from Gertrude Shope. 01/03/1988

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Teboho Maitse (in conjunction with Jen Marchbank). "Revealing Silences: Voices from South Africa," in Meredith Turshen and Clotilde Twagiramariya (eds). *What Women Do in Wartime:*

The concerns of women and violence were certainly something the Women's Section and Shope were aware of, but as shown throughout this thesis, those issues invariably took a secondary role to the matter of liberation to apartheid. The issues had been raised, however, and from the evidence presented in correspondence and meeting minutes, the Women's Section could conceivably act on these particular problems in, as yet, limited ways.

The Malibongwe Women's Conference from the 6 to the 20th of January 1989 was organised in Amsterdam with the express purpose of uniting members of women's organisations inside of South Africa to analyze the current political situation and "realise non-sexist policies and practices within our structures and our communities..."⁵⁴ That same year, with the ascendance to power of F.W. De Klerk as President of South Africa in September of 1989, mass detentions of political activists were suspended, and key ANC activists, including Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki, were released from prison. In January of 1990, De Klerk unbanned the ANC and other political organisations. That same year, Nelson Mandela, who had become a national and international symbol of the ANC's struggle against apartheid, was released from prison.

If apartheid was not dead, it was certainly dying. Whether or not the negotiation among the many political parties would be a peaceful or ultimately democratic process was still – and would remain – uncertain during the early 1990s. But the doors had been partially opened, and the ANC, its Youth League, and the Women's League were legally able to set up structures within the country.

With the slow dismantling of apartheid, the ANC had begun and would continue to unify itself into not a mass movement but a viable political party. The Women's League, too, would become caught up in this metamorphosis. Yet, instead of being freed from the ties of

Gender and Conflict in Africa (London: Zed Books. 1998), 208.

⁵⁴ Mayibuye Archives. Periodicals Collection. (VOW No 4. 1989), 1

the movement and empowered with the ability to finally put women's issues to fore, the Women's League was to become a site of political tension and disunity that would finally cause the ANC leadership to enforce its role as parent-body to the organisation, suspend its funding, and take a firm stranglehold on the accepted programme of action for the Women's League in a democratic South Africa.

Sometime during the return of women in exile, the re-launching of the league in Durban in 1990, the conferences and negotiations, the democratic election of 1994, and the subsequent political turmoil of the League, the *Voice of Women* as a journal of the Women's League was abandoned. Its original aim, to educate "the international community on the plight and disabilities being suffered by Black women; in particular African women as they suffer the three-fold oppression and exploitation under [sic] Apartheid system," had become superfluous. Apartheid had been dismantled. The National Party government had been voted out by a group of voters whose voting rights did not depend upon their skin colour.

Unfortunately, the exploitation and oppression of women did not end with apartheid. The Women's League's *Voice*, however, did.

Epilogue and Conclusion

From Activism to... "Something Else"¹: The Women's League and Party Unity

Post-1990

The ANC Women's League was re-launched in Durban on 9th August, 1990. The ANCWL now consisted of two teams of women, the Women's League Task Force, led by Albertina Sisulu and comprising ANC women who had been present inside of the country, and Gertrude Shope's Women's Section, which consisted of those League women who had been working in exile. After establishing ANCWL structures inside of the country, it became the goal of the newly launched ANCWL to make certain that women's voices were heard in the negotiating process between the ANC, other political parties, and the NP government.

The new ANCWL would be able to elect its own leaders, and significantly, would be now be able to open its own bank account. Autonomy for the organisation appeared to be within sight, which would have made it possible for the ANCWL to become the organisation at the forefront of the struggle for women's rights. Though the League failed in its attempt to require the ANC to appoint women to 30% of the positions within its NEC, it did succeed in its bid to require that 30% of the party's elected positions be taken by women.

At its 1991 conference, campaigning for Women's League President were Albertina Sisulu, head of the Women's Task Force, Gertrude Shope, and the charismatic Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Sisulu withdrew at the last moment and urged her supporters to vote for Shope, upsetting supporters of Madikizela-Mandela and effectively pitting the League into pro- and anti- Madikizela-Mandela camps.

What little autonomy the ANCWL had gained upon its immediate re-launch in South Africa, quickly began to deteriorate during the next women's conference in 1993, when Madikizela-Mandela -- already a prominent and controversial figure in the media due to her

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court charges of kidnapping and assault, the suspending of her region of the ANCWL undertaken by the League due to her use of the League to protest the actions of the ANC, and her subsequent suspension from her government position as Deputy Minister of Social Welfare – was elected President of the Women’s League. Madikizela-Mandela withdrew the ANCWL from the National Women’s Coalition. In protest of her leadership of the League, eleven members of the League’s own NEC – including Mavivi Manzini, who had worked on VOW in Lusaka for many years – walked out.² In response to Madikizela-Mandela’s use of the ANCWL as a platform from which to criticise the policies of the ANC, the ANC withdrew the limited autonomy of the League by suspending its bank account in 1996, effectively crippling the organisation. This was apparently done “to alert the league to its dependence on the ANC and the need to resolve its problems.”³ Despite this, Madikizela-Mandela was re-elected as President of the Women’s League in 1997. In April of 2003, Madikizela-Mandela was convicted of fraud charges which included writing letters on ANCWL letterheads to Saambou Bank to falsely claim that the loan applicants mentioned in the letters were employed by the ANCWL.⁴

The League’s most visible role in the media post-1990 was its relationship to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, and her use and abuse of the organisation as a platform from which to criticise the politics of the ANC. The few press statements coming out of the ANCWL post-1990 were issued directly from the ANC. After the 1997 press statement concerning the ANC’s inquiry into the ANCWL, those press statements coming from the African National Congress and attributed to the League consisted of the League’s stance on “Continuing Road Carnage,” (1998) its “Pledge of Support for Provincial Government’s Anti-AIDS/HIV Programmes,” (December 1999) and HIV/AIDS action plan, (December 1999), a declaration

¹ Interview with female ANC parliamentarian, quoted in Hannah Britton, “The Incomplete Revolution.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. (4:1 April 2002), 60

² *Weekly Mail (&Guardian)*. “When Thabo Came to Winnie’s Rescue.” 17/02/1995

³ *Weekly Mail (&Guardian)*. “Leagues Away From Unity.” 13/09/1996

of solidarity with a woman dismissed for being HIV positive (December 2001), a condemnation of assaults on marchers by taxi operators (February 2002), and various statements commemorating 9th August, South African Women's Day.⁵

The 1997 conference that saw Madikizela-Mandela re-elected as President of the ANCWL stressed above all else the need for "unity" within the organisation. The League's programme of action for the next four years was to concentrate on "Unity, Peace and Development," and to ensure that after the conference the members emerged "more united than ever before." Number one on the list of conference resolutions was to "build a strong Women's League by working closely with the ANC and Youth League," followed immediately by "establish a separate membership system for the League, *with the proviso that a person should join the ANC first*" [emphasis mine]. Number seven on the list, after putting into place "effective financial systems" is the resolution to "take various measures towards the empowerment of women to play an active role in social transformation..."⁶ As its place on the list implied, the goal of working toward forwarding the rights of women in South Africa was not among the most important priorities of the League, an interesting development, considering the fact that the Women's Section working in Lusaka was beginning to make moves toward occupying itself directly with women's concerns, concerns voiced in its publications and always a large part of its yearly programme, even during 1985-86, when towing the ANC line of militant mass mobilisation was so strong.

The failure of the League has, in effect, been the silencing of its voice – or rather, the dominance of one voice above all the others. Madikizela-Mandela's continued appearances in court and the existence of pro- and anti- supporters of hers within in the League, instead of uniting over those issues they had common feelings about, divided over the role of the

⁴ *Mail and Guardian*. "Winnie Goes to Jain, Resigns as MP." 25/04/2003

⁵ ANC Press Statements Available at: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/pr>

⁶ Report of the ANC Women's League National Conference. Available at: <http://www.anc.org.za/wl/docs/conf97/wlreport.html>

League president. It is fitting that Madikizela-Mandela has become known to many as the “Mother of the Nation,” a mantle whose significance was explored in Chapter Two of this thesis, and an image used so frequently in VOW.

Throughout this thesis, I have addressed the history of the ANCWL’s publication *Voice of Women* in an attempt to understand the complex relationship between the ANC Women’s League and the dominant ANC party, in part, to examine the images reproduced in the publication and the subsequent definition of women aligned with the struggle against apartheid. Madikizela-Mandela has come to personify this ideal female activist, the “Mother of the Nation” and has subsequently become the visible nexus of the tensions between the ANC and the Women’s League, an organisation that could – and did, under Madikizela-Mandela’s leadership – serve as a force capable of acting as a check on the ANC and its promised reforms post-1994. That check could be seen as being at the expense of many of the women inside of the country, but many of the League President’s critiques against the ANC involved voicing her displeasure at the economic policies of the ANC that had failed to alleviate poverty.⁷ Women, as a majority of the population of South Africa, would be primary among those suffering the disadvantages of poverty.

The “three-fold” oppression of women under apartheid as expressed by VOW throughout its history, did not disappear with the dismantling of apartheid, and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, “Mother of the Nation” has found her own voice crippled by her conviction on fraud charges. Whether the silencing of the President of the Women’s League and the subsequent controversy around her will allow the League to function more effectively or merely further incite the organisation’s disunity is as yet unclear.

But what this history of the *Voice of Women* has shown is that during those times in which the ANC had the most control over the League and the publications it produced,

⁷ Siphon Seepe, Rehana Rossouw and Drew Forrest. *Mail & Guardian*. “Understanding Winnie.” 02/11/2001

particularly during 1985-86, women's concerns were subverted, but never entirely silenced, by the dominant party line. I have attempted to illustrate this negotiation of the ANC Women's Secretariat in Lusaka as both a women's movement concerned with issues of particular interest to women, and as a loyal auxiliary unit of the ANC committed to supporting the movement's broader political policies through this examination of VOW.

Chapter One saw the emergence of VOW as a League publication produced on a wholly voluntary basis, with limited funding for its production and rudimentary format and design. Chapter Two saw that the publication was able to both expand its audience and professionalize its design with the requested assistance of the Department of Information and Publicity. The involvement of the DIP, however, also meant increasing interest in the publication and the ways in which it appealed to women. In asking for assistance and further funding, the staff of VOW was required to tow the party line of the ANC more clearly. A closer relationship with the DIP meant a loss of autonomy for the staff. As explored in Chapter Two and mentioned here briefly, the ANC, as with other post-liberation movements, did attempt to shut women out of the negotiation process and political manoeuvring within the country post-liberation, effectively asking that the baby be taken up again and the rifle put down. The women inside the ANCWL did manage to achieve one third of the seats in parliament, but not within the NEC, revealing the negotiation of the two organisations – women's emancipation was only allowed so long as it did not create disunity within the organisation by challenging the ANC's authority. Actions taken by the ANCWL became strictly defined by their adherence to ANC policy.

Chapter Three of this thesis showed that the staff of VOW was able to address concerns of interest to women while simultaneously adhering to ANC policy. The Depo Provera campaign, however, created interesting tensions within the League, as contraceptives were requested for and being provided to women involved in the camps in exile, while VOW

attacked the notion of family planning and urged women to have more children. The anti-contraception and family planning policy turned out to be unrealistic in practice, highlighting the tensions between a political stance against contraception and the lived reality of the majority of African women inside South Africa, a problem never wholly resolved in VOW. In Chapter Four, I detailed the change in rhetoric directed at women during the 1985-89 period, from increasing militancy in 1985-86 and a more concerted effort to include white women in the struggle, to a publication interested, once again, in primarily discussing the plight of women and children inside of South Africa under apartheid and reporting on the back-and-forth negotiations going on between the NP government and the ANC. As negotiations continued, VOW attained more autonomy to address issues of women's education and emancipation, though not in a radically feminist way. Chapter Four also showed that the Women's Secretariat, in any case, was well aware of the task ahead post-1990 – that of educating women and making certain their voices were heard in the new South Africa.

It could be argued that a great deal of the League's autonomy and power was undercut by the ANC when it chose to suspend the organisation's funding, or that Madikizela-Mandela's ambivalent leadership of the organisation served to subvert and make a mockery of the role of the League in women's emancipation. Whatever the case, the tensions inside of the League have led to the creation of many more women's organisations inside of the country. In 1997, when the Termination of Pregnancy Bill came up in Parliament, the organisations that spoke up most adamantly during its discussion were the Reproductive Rights Alliance, the Abortion Reform Action Group, Rape Crisis, Ilitha LaBantu, the Gender Advocacy Project, the Women's Human Rights Documentation Centre, the New Women's

Movements, the Human Rights Commission and the Commission for Gender equality, among others.⁸

The significance of this conclusion, that the League was able to negotiate between addressing women's issues and the goals of the dominant party, and appeared fully aware of those tasks ahead of it inside of the country lies in the subsequent break from this knowledge and ability in the post-1990 period. It is not the purpose of this thesis to go into a detailed history of the League post-1990, though a work which explores the negotiation of the party during this period would certainly be beneficial in order to understand how an organisation that had functioned in exile as an auxiliary to the ANC split so decisively once it was able to put its own structures up inside of the country. Attempts to "unite" the League at its 1997 conference have not seen any change in its effectiveness on women's issues, or a change in the way in which it is able to manage its funds. First allegiance to the ANC, while empowering women in exile to produce a better publication and expand its programme of action, has failed to improve its effectiveness inside of post-liberation South Africa.

⁸ *Weekly Mail (& Guardian)*. "Women's League is Dying." 09/05/1997

A Note On Sources

Compiling copies of the *Voice of Women*, meeting minutes and Women's Secretariat correspondence required a number of research trips to various archives throughout the country, several of which have since undergone some changes.

I conducted the first phase of my research in March-June of 2002 at the Phyllis Naidoo Collection, lodged at the University of Durban-Westville Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre. Subsequent trips to the centre at the end of that year revealed that the collection was undergoing a major reclassification of its contents that should be completed sometime this year. Unfortunately, the reclassification of that collection means that a number of the files and folders cited in the following bibliography may or may not still be the specified location. The Naidoo Collection was an excellent starting point, as it is composed of documents that span the time period from the ANC's banning in 1960 to its unbanning in 1990. Naidoo's collection contains a variety of correspondence and publications from this period, though nothing that pertains specifically to the ANCWL, aside from two or three VOW issues which are mixed with other documents addressing the concerns of women in South Africa during the thirty-year time period encompassed by the collection.

In August of 2002, I took a research trip to the South African History Archive Trust at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg where I obtained copies of VOW for the 1974-1979 time period in the Karis-Gerhart Collection. Some ANCWL correspondence and miscellaneous flyers are available within the collection. However, while the guide the collection indicated that a complete run of VOW was available there, I encountered instead two half-empty boxes with notes tucked inside indicating that the journals had been removed and would be returned "in 1999." As it was the winter of 2002, I had very little hope that the contents would be returned, which facilitated the necessity for the following research appointments.

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Trips to Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape just outside Cape Town were made in January and March of 2003. In January, I was given the provision that I could conduct research in the ANC collection there so long as I did not make photocopies – the notes made were all transcribed onto my laptop. The reason given for this was that the ANC had not yet been through the collection to officially remove/censor any of the documents as of yet. When I returned in March, I was told that the collection would be closed to further researchers at the end of that week, until such time as someone was sent from the ANC to go over the collection. The staff at Mayibuye Centre gave me specific instructions on how to properly cite the material from this collection, including the issues for VOW I obtained from the 1980s – which were available to photocopy so long as they were cited from the periodicals collection at Mayibuye Centre. The meeting minutes, correspondence, and VOW publications lodged at Mayibuye Centre were by far the most helpful of the collections I went through for the purposes of this dissertation, as I found the majority of available information on the ANCWL and VOW within this collection.

Finally, in May of 2003, I took a trip to the ANC Archives at the University of Fort Hare in Alice and obtained the final portion of available correspondence and meeting minutes of the Women's Secretariat in Lusaka currently available to the public. As far as I know, the contents of this archive are not set to be reshuffled in the near future, and the guide to the contents of the collections I cite are accurate.

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