

POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA: WHAT ABOUT WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION?*

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As we enter the 1990s, we are hopeful of attaining a transition to a new democratic post-apartheid South Africa during this decade. Many organisations have for years been resisting the tyranny of apartheid, and they now find themselves having to work towards the construction of the post-apartheid regime of their dreams.

Inevitably, those organisations which have already established themselves and started winning significant demands, are clearer in their vision of what kind of South Africa they are fighting for, and more advanced in their ability to devise strategies for getting there. The progressive trade union movement is an obvious instance of this. It now stands as the watchdog of working class interests, ready to enforce its demands through militant action during the process of political change. But people who have suffered exploitation based on criteria other than class, such as sex, sexual orientation, physical handicap, etc, are less well accommodated organisationally than the working class.

The African National Congress (ANC), in its attempt to build a democratic post-apartheid South Africa free from all forms of oppression and exploitation, has started to look at how to do this. But due to the absence of strong grass-roots feminist organisation in South Africa, the ANC does so with very little strongly-directed guidance from militant democratic women's organisations.

This paper attempts to lay out what needs to be done in South Africa on the side of the progressive forces working for change, in order to ensure a transition to a transformed society where women are emancipated from patriarchal oppression. It attempts, firstly, to analyse theoretically the basis of women's oppression in society today. Secondly, it attempts to pinpoint the focal aspects which need to be tackled in principle, in order for the emancipation of women to be achieved. Here I am proposing that key focuses are: (a) challenging patriarchy; (b) transforming women's position in the occupational division of labour; and (c) reformulating the national question, and identification of the types of issues which need to be taken up in order to address (a) and (b).

Lastly, it attempts to draw on the analysis of women's oppression and on some experiences in other countries, to propose a programme of organisational work and tasks which need to be undertaken. The intention is to move away from debates and thinking centred on *single-factor* solutions to the problem of the gender transformation of South African society, and instead try to grapple with the full complexity of the task which lies ahead for women in post-apartheid South Africa.

of Women's Oppression

is some debate in organisations in South Africa around the need or otherwise of *women's liberation*. Much of this centres around whether or not it is justified for women to be subjected to patriarchal exploitation because of the biological differences between men and women. Christine Delphy calls this 'naturalism' (1984:23).

We long ago rejected naturalistic justifications for the perpetuation of racism (whites must rule blacks because they are superior to blacks) or capitalism (in the 19th century, the exploitation of the working class was justified by the inferiority of its members (Delphy, 1984:23)). Naturalist explanations for the exploitation of women in patriarchal society are just as hollow, and only serve to legitimise the oppression of women's oppression.

In response to this there is a feminist naturalist counter, which is to say that the biological differences between men and women actually make women superior to men. Women's subjugation is, therefore, a consequence of men feeling threatened by women's superiority. However, this is also not very satisfactory. The exploitation of women in patriarchal society is not a phenomenon of nature. It is a social phenomenon, like other forms of exploitation, has a material basis.

The first Marxist who tackled a substantial analysis of the subjugation of women in patriarchal society was F Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Engels analysed family structures in different societies through the ages, tracing a historical pattern of transition from matriarchal to patriarchal forms, and then a narrowing down to the form of patriarchy which he linked intrinsically to capitalism, i.e. the monogamous family. He described this form as the subjugation of the female sex by the male for the purpose of securing the ownership of private property, and regarded it as essential to perpetuating the capitalist system. His vision was that, when capitalism is overthrown and replaced by a classless society, this form of exploitation would be replaced by voluntary freely-chosen sexual unions within which the status of male and female would be equal, as would their status in the broader society (Engels, 1975). Unfortunately this analysis is very idealistic and deterministic, and gives the idea that a class struggle would automatically solve the problems of women's oppression, and end their battle against capital for a classless society. It does not leave much room for the organisation of women to struggle against their oppression. From this work, which at least attempts to identify the exploitation of women in the family in capitalist society, most Marxist theory is singularly lacking in its analysis of the basis of women's oppression. Most Marxist theory divides society into classes based upon their relationship to the means of production. Women who do nothing in the home or in family businesses are taken to belong to the same class as the male head of the family. This then masks the relations of exploitation within the family. Alternatively, some Marxists or socialist feminists make a clumsy attempt to define all women as belonging to the working class - which clearly does

not fit either.

Christine Delphy attributes this difficulty to an incorrect analysis of marriage and the family. She points to the dependence of married women on their husbands in order to achieve a particular class position, irrespective of whether or not they have a classical relationship to production (ie a job). She identifies the existence of a domestic mode of production in terms of which married women give their labour power in exchange for being maintained in the class position of the head of the home (her husband). Her dependence upon the husband becomes a stronger index of class membership than her economic occupation (if she has one). Hence the 'patriarchal class system overrides the industrial one' (Delphy, 1984:38). Delphy points out that in classical Marxist theory, the family is regarded purely as a unit of consumption. She challenges this on two grounds. Firstly, she holds that consumption within families is not common or undifferentiated, as the term *unit* implies, and that different patterns of consumption (and the maintenance of these) within families correspond to different class positions even within the family. Secondly, she argues that the family is also an important unit of production. She points to the production of food in rural families, and the production of certain goods and services in all families, by the women (and to a lesser extent some of the children) for consumption by the whole family (Delphy, 1984).

Delphy's criticism of Marxist theory, as put forward by traditional communist parties, is that it 'does not account for the oppression common to all women, and it concentrates, not on the oppression of women, but on the consequences this oppression has for the proletariat' (Delphy, 1984:57). It, therefore, incorrectly regards the oppression of women as a secondary derivative of the class struggle under capitalism. Where women's oppression still survives in so-called socialist countries, it is attributed to purely ideological factors, in the absence of any material oppression which it serves to rationalise. Delphy challenges this non-Marxist definition of ideology, and insists on the oppression of women (and the ideological practices and institutions which uphold it) being linked to the material patriarchal exploitation which results from the domestic mode of production. This analysis certainly takes Marxists much further than the classical Marxists, or the traditional communist parties, have ever managed to do. I would argue that this analysis is extremely appropriate, not only to the French situation where Delphy comes from, but also to the South African situation.

There are two modes of production in our society. Most goods are produced in the industrial mode. Domestic services, child-rearing, and certain other goods are produced in the family mode. The first mode of production gives rise to capitalist exploitation. The second gives rise to familial, or more precisely, patriarchal exploitation (Delphy, 1984:69).

She points out that the wife in a family remains responsible for the production of goods and services in the domestic sphere, even if she also enters the industrial labour market. Either she has to produce these goods and services (as always, on

an unpaid basis) after returning from her job in the industrial sphere, or she has to pay from her salary to hire the services of somebody else to perform these services. While the breakdown of family life generally in society today, has created many variations in the theme of the family unit, it still remains true to say that it is only women who are under an *obligation* to produce goods and services for domestic consumption. Men who do so, usually do so as a favour, not as an obligation. This is why Delphy maintains that 'patriarchy is the common, specific and main oppression of women' (Delphy, 1984:74). Women are only supposed to enter the industrial labour force once they have fulfilled their primary 'family duties', which are in turn an obstacle which allows capital to exploit women even more than men in their occupations outside the home.

Even where women do not live in a marriage or a family unit, the service of child care remains the primary responsibility of mothers (the majority of women, in the South African context) or grandmothers in a patriarchal society. The patriarchal ideal dominates society both ideologically and economically, despite the widespread break-up of the standard married family unit, and women both inside and outside the standard family structures experience the oppression specific to patriarchal domination.

Of course, not all women experience the same immiseration as a result of patriarchal exploitation, just as, in a capitalist mode of production, not all workers are equally badly off. In the South African situation, the idle bourgeois housewife who gets money from her husband to employ a servant springs to mind, as a glaring contrast to the woman worker or the hard-working proletarian housewife. But even in this case, the wife has the responsibility of ensuring the provision of the goods and services for the family's consumption, even where the servant who is in turn exploited by her does most of the labour. If the servant does not turn up, the wife has to do the labour. The basic relationship of exploitation remains the key in that mode of production. It is this relationship which is central to the maintenance of patriarchy in society. Although patriarchy is much older than capitalism, modern patriarchal domination is now reinforced by the relationship of exploitation central to the capitalist mode of production.

In South Africa, where we have a capitalist patriarchal society, we clearly have a capitalist mode of production and a domestic mode of production which articulate with each other in a single complex social formation. Together with the racial oppression which has characterised South African society¹, we live in a society dependent on the exploitation of the working class and the exploitation of women. As we work towards a post-apartheid society in South Africa, it is therefore essential that we strive to eliminate not only the racism of apartheid, but also exploitation of women and the working class, if we want to achieve a democratic transformation.

Tasks for Emancipation

A revolutionary concept of emancipation must involve not only the systematic

addressing of women's interests and gender interests to improve the status of women relative to that of men, but also a societal transformation. This transformation would need to dismantle patriarchy, first and foremost. Secondly, the marginal role which women play in the occupational division of labour would have to be transformed to a central one. Thirdly, given the current phase in the political history in South Africa, and the fact that we are engaged in a national democratic struggle against the apartheid regime, the national question in South Africa needs to be reformulated to ensure that the struggle becomes a gender-conscious struggle for a new transformed South Africa.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is upheld by means of a web of laws, public and private structures (including the family), religious and traditional practices, ideological apparatuses (including schools, media, etc) and the marginalised status of women in the society. On occasion, where all of this still does not seem to keep women or their sexuality under control, violence against women (and sometimes children) is another way of reinforcing patriarchal control. Patriarchy is a form of societal organisation that is older than capitalism, and for many it is just the way things have always been, were meant to be and always will be. So needless to say, attempts to challenge patriarchy usually meet with great resistance, even from many of those people whom we see as our comrades (both men and women). Revolutionary movements often deal with other less contentious issues instead of, or before, trying to tackle patriarchal exploitation, hoping it will somehow just go away by itself once other forms of exploitation are eliminated. Any social movement which claims to be fighting for the emancipation of women and at the same time stresses that there is nothing threatening in this, is deluding itself. Such a movement clearly does not intend radically transforming the patriarchal nature of society, and is not likely to get any further than introducing a few reforms. All laws, practices and ideological apparatuses which uphold patriarchy or in any way give an inferior status to women, have to be abolished or transformed.

Division of Labour

Formal Sector

By and large, South Africa's women are situated in the home, in certain traditionally female sectors of industry (usually at the less skilled and lower income levels) and in the informal sector. The heart of the capitalist economy (energy, mining, metal, engineering, transport, petro-chemical, etc) is all but closed to women. In South Africa, employers in these sectors unashamedly offer training opportunities and employment to males only.

One obvious task in creating equality for women, is to introduce effective employment equity in all sectors of the economy and, in addition, to implement affirmative action programmes to phase women into these sectors at an accelerated

rate in order to equalise the proportions of men and women employed in traditionally male sectors of the economy. Clearly this would go hand in hand with the transformation of the education system. Women also need to be drawn into political and professional life, at all levels, not merely in the lower ranks, as is usually the case.

Trade unions have a responsibility in pushing for the transformation of women's marginal role in the formal economy. However, all over the world (and South Africa is not an exception) unions tend to have the same patriarchal character as the rest of society, because patriarchy is not specific to the bourgeoisie - it is equally strongly entrenched among the working class. This means that presently in trade unions, it is not always easy to give priority to gender issues. Even where a few of the more glaring gender issues are suitably dealt with, it is almost impossible to get a real commitment in the progressive unions to fighting all aspects of gender discrimination in the same way in which there is a real commitment to fighting all aspects of race discrimination. Paradoxically, the level of gender sensitivity is often even lower in unions with a high proportion of women members than in those with very few women members.

For this reason, it is important for women's forums, committees or departments to be active within all trade unions, even those where the vast majority of members are women. Most gender issues which are taken up by unions originate more easily in women's forums than in other union structures which are normally male-dominated or heavily influenced by male organisers. Women's forums can more easily motivate and obtain acceptance for programmes which they have had the chance to develop in forums where women can more freely exchange ideas.

In order to avoid a highly divisive situation whereby unions end up standing with the bosses in defending patriarchal practices in industry, against women's organisations and progressive government policies, trade unions need to ensure that they are in the forefront of pushing for the transformation of industry's current racist and sexist practices. Trade unions have to take responsibility for leading a working class struggle to transform women's position within the occupational division of labour.

Division of Labour

Informal Sector

One area of the economy which women dominate, and which needs to be part of an economic analysis, is the informal sector. Presently the informal sector is regarded as marginal to the mainstream economy, despite the large numbers of people (mainly women) involved in various forms of informal sector economic activities. The apartheid state has recently lifted the restrictions on most types of informal sector activities, while simultaneously washing its hands of responsibility for people in this sector through the privatisation process, etc. The state seeks to facilitate the entry of people into the informal sector of the economy, thereby leaving them to their own resources and marginalising them from the mainstream (formal)

economy and also government resources and social services (moving towards what has been called the *50% society*). Women bear the brunt of this strategy in more ways than one, because they also end up performing social services which the state is neglecting to provide, such as care of the elderly, the sick, the physically and mentally disabled.

A new gendered approach is needed towards the informal sector. Opponents of the state's current approach tend to focus on solutions within the formal sector and ignore the already existing informal sector, which is to contribute further to the invisibility of women in economic analysis. The existing informal sector needs to be de-marginalised by being accounted for in the make-up of the economy to the extent that it cannot simply be dismantled and incorporated into the formal economy (which is not the same as saying that it must be extended). The state also must bear social responsibility for the people engaged in informal sector activity, as it does for people in the mainstream economy. Also included in the informal sector are illegal practices such as prostitution and drug-dealing. A necessary step to enable a new state to deal with all the problems associated with prostitution, would be its decriminalisation. However, the simple legalisation of prostitution would not be sufficient. Thereafter it would have to be dealt with by materially addressing the various forces which lead women to make their money in this way.

One of the big disadvantages of the informal sector is the absence of organisations such as trade unions, which act as a powerful presence to force working class interests onto the political agenda. The organisations which work with the informal sector tend to be humanitarian organisations, various types of development agencies, and sometimes government bodies. But none of these have the collective grass-roots political and economic clout of trade unions. It is therefore critical that a democratic grass-roots organisation of self-employed people be formed, to address and collectivise the economic and political interests of self-employed people in the same way trade unions do in the case of waged workers. This type of organisation does not have many precedents, presumably because the informal sector is much more fragmented than the formally employed sector of the working class, and therefore more difficult to organise. However, there is one such antecedent, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, which by all accounts is a highly successful organisation in merging the interests of a vast range of self-employed women (Sharma, 1989). The vast majority of self-employed people in India are women, as in South Africa. (In South Africa, the notable exception to this would be taxi-owners, who themselves are organised into a very powerful association.) SEWA operates a *poor people's bank* for its members, which has proved to be successful beyond all hopes, due to the fact that women appear to pay their debts more promptly than men! In South Africa, the formation of such an organisation, and such a bank, would be a necessary development for the empowerment of the poorest women in our society.

Division of Labour

Domestic Sphere

In order to make it possible for women to play a central role in society and in the economy, they cannot be expected also to retain all the responsibility for child care and domestic work, ie their double load. Some of these tasks must be taken out of the household and socialised. But there always remain some domestic tasks to be done at home, so in addition to the above, the household must be transformed into one where men and women are mutually responsible for child care and domestic work.

It would seem, therefore, that there is no way of avoiding the thorny area of transforming the domestic sphere, without having the effect of seriously compromising the goal of women's emancipation. Men and women who live together have to take equal responsibility for all domestic functions which are not socialised. This includes child care, housework, care of sick, disabled and elderly members of the family, etc. Here of course lies one of the biggest challenges to the patriarchal system, for much of the patriarchal character of our society lurks in old traditions and practices which originate within the home and the extended family. Traditional divisions of unpaid domestic labour create a saving for the capitalist economy. Traditions like lobola and polygamy originated under pre-capitalist conditions, but they persist today and make it difficult for women to be seen as equals within the home. Traditions like the employment by more wealthy women of servants have allowed men to continue to avoid domestic tasks, created a class of ultra-exploited domestic workers, and middle-class children who grow up unaware of domestic responsibilities. This puts these women employers on the wrong side of the national question, while at the same time they experience gender subordination in the home. This is the place where men have always had the right to control women's sexuality, activities, whereabouts and unpaid work, in an unequal relationship. All this is now threatened with extinction once men and women are seen as people with equal rights in law, and with equal responsibility in the domestic sphere.

Needless to say, transformation in this area, while being absolutely essential, will not be achieved by a new constitution and laws, or progressive government policies alone. Very extensive organisation of women and a clear feminist political direction is needed on an ongoing basis in this sphere. It is an enormous task, and one where organisations must be prepared to deal with a certain amount of backlash. Therefore there has to be an extensive education programme aimed at transforming attitudes. School syllabuses have to be scrutinised and changed to be gender-neutral, as well as university and tertiary course material. All media style and content has to be stripped of patriarchal and racial bias. This must be extended to advertising, where women's bodies cannot be allowed to be used to sell products.

All progressive organisations need to make a priority of educating their memberships on the need for change and the importance of equality in order to build proper democracy. There needs to be feminist monitoring organisations which are on the

look-out for areas which have been left out and which will devise means to address these. Progressive cultural organisations need to develop means of putting across ways to relate differently to women in the home and outside of it.

National Question

There are many different ways of defining the national question, reflecting different political perspectives of a particular liberation struggle. The most simple nationalist path is to fight for the extension of political rights to all, before recognising differences and class stratifications within the oppressed society. Where the national question is perceived in this way, the oppression of disadvantaged groups within that society, such as workers, women and other subordinate categories of people, tend to be overlooked and these people do not necessarily benefit economically and socially from national liberation. Where there is a strong working class movement (as we can claim in South Africa) the national question may address working class rights and issues as well (albeit sometimes only through struggle). It is essential for us in South Africa, that the national question must give precedence to the rights and issues affecting women, and all marginalised people (the majority of whom are invariably women in any event), in order for them to have an equal place in the new nation which is being built. And it is essential that the level of women's organisation around gender issues be heightened in order to strive for this, and to maintain all gains made in this area. It is not good enough to say that we will deal with women's issues after we have achieved national liberation. By now there are enough glaring examples all over the world where this position has resulted in women being short-changed, even after very dedicated participation in liberation struggles.

The question then is, what do we mean by the *women's interests* or *gender interests* which need to be addressed as part of the national liberation struggle? Maxine Molyneux has developed an interesting way to group gender interests in a way which is helpful to planning political policy and organising women for change. She makes the point that it is 'difficult, if not impossible to generalise about the interests of women' because of women's different class, ethnic, religious and personal background and positions in society. She, therefore, chooses to use the term 'gender interests' to 'differentiate them from the false homogeneity imposed by the notion of "women's interests"' (Molyneux, 1986:283). Gender interests are those which women (or men) develop as a result of the way in which their gender attributes have positioned them in society.

She divides gender interests into two groups.

'Strategic gender interests are derived from an analysis of women's subordination and from the formulation of an alternative, more satisfactory set of arrangements' (Molyneux, 1986:284). They would include issues such as:

- abolition of the sexual division of labour;
- alleviation of the burdens of domestic labour and child care;

- removal of institutionalised discrimination;
- establishment of political equality;
- freedom of choice over childbearing;
- adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women.

Molyneux calls these *feminist* demands, and the level of consciousness required to struggle effectively for them, a feminist consciousness. Clearly these sorts of demands are all directed at challenging and ultimately eliminating all forms of patriarchal domination.

'Practical gender interests arise from the concrete conditions of women's positioning by virtue of their gender within the division of labour... (These) are usually a response to immediate perceived needs and do not generally entail a strategic goal such as women's emancipation or gender equality' (Molyneux, 1986:284). These interests are primarily economic, revolving around issues of domestic provision, daily welfare of the household, and public welfare, the areas for which women are primarily responsible in the existing sexual division of labour. Very often collective actions taken by women are around practical gender interests, with no necessary intention to challenge patriarchy. However, practical gender interests can obviously become strategic gender interests in the context of political organisation for change, in much the same way as mobilising on the basis of workers' economic interests can become part of a political challenge to capitalism.

Neither practical nor strategic gender interests can be taken alone as a political programme aimed at ending the oppression of women, without causing the differences between women's positions in society to result in organisational division and acrimony. 'Women's unity and cohesion on gender issues cannot be assumed. While they can form the basis of unity around a common programme, such unity has to be constructed' (Molyneux, 1986:285). It is therefore essential that any attempts to transform women's position in society must address both strategic and practical gender interests if they are to succeed in both overcoming women's immediate economic oppression and eroding the patriarchal system.

In order successfully to reformulate the National Question so that patriarchal exploitation is being seriously addressed, *all* political organisations working for national liberation have to address seriously both strategic and practical gender needs, not merely the women's organisations. This does not mean, of course, that there is no role for women's organisations (ie organisations of women only), which will still need to be taking on the primary function of organising women in a space where they are not subject to domination by men in organisational forums. In addition, there is a critical need for strong feminist organisations (in the sense in which Molyneux defines feminism above), which have to constantly lobby and pressurise other political organisations to keep up this focus.

Organisation

A fleeting look at what has happened to the status of women during times of political change,² shows up the following:

(a) National liberation movements always call on the participation of women, but this does not necessarily say anything about the level of commitment to women's emancipation;

(b) The key factor in women's emancipation is the transformation of patriarchy. But this has by and large not been successful, even where other aspects of transformation took place;

(c) It is relatively easier for governments to attend to the economic issues affecting women (ie practical gender interests);

(d) But even in this area it is expensive to achieve substantial material progress. Therefore conservative governments will avoid dealing even with practical gender interests where possible;

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

(f) There is always the problem of backlash, particularly once women's status in society does start to improve.

Most socialist or popular nationalist governments claim that they will look after the interests and rights of women. However, at the same time, some of them have refused women the right to organise as women - particularly in the USSR and Eastern Europe before Perestroika (Kruks et al, 1989). This gives rise to a clearly contradictory situation whereby the patriarchal state, not women as a collective force, decides what is best for women. The argument which is usually convincingly used by nationalist or socialist political movements to persuade women that it is not in their interests to organise as women, is that their women's organisations will be contaminated by the dreaded *Western feminism* or *bourgeois feminism*. The political consequence of this is the continued subordination of gender struggles to national or class struggles in the society.

In order to maintain the struggle against patriarchal domination, women must be organised as women and as feminists. The main task for women's organisation which is working for transformation, is both to be involved in the mainstream of political struggle and everyday life, and at the same time to be able to step back and criticise the existing system in order to formulate a radical alternative, free of the ever-present patriarchal ideological constraints. This is not an easy balance to achieve (Briskin, 1989). Some organisations will inevitably be so caught up in the mainstream as to be unable to challenge the system they operate within. Others who manage to step back and theorise on radical alternatives, may make the opposite mistake of becoming alienated from the majority of women and their concerns. There is no single answer telling us what the right balance is between

these two aspects of women's struggle. In Briskin's words, 'socialist feminist practice must constantly struggle to combine and resolve the contradictions of mainstreaming and disengagement' (Briskin, 1989:102-3).

In South Africa we know that we only challenge oppression successfully through strong and ongoing organisation. It has to be so with the fight against women's oppression too. In addition to constitutional and legal changes aimed at removing institutionalised discrimination, oppression and inherent disadvantage, there has to be strong organisation of women - not necessarily in a single organisation. The need for separate women's organisations in a patriarchal society, where most organisations also have a patriarchal character, is very clear, certainly at least until such time as women are no longer at a relative disadvantage in the society. In other countries where there has been a struggle for transition, such as Mozambique and Nicaragua, it does not even appear that the question of separate women's organisations was much of an issue. It was assumed to be necessary. And in South Africa, the existence of a Women's League in the ANC is obviously, at least in part, due to a recognition of this need. In any event, there is too much work to be done in the struggle for gender equality to leave it up to other organisations which already have too much on their plate. But of course, this is not necessarily sufficient for the successful challenge of patriarchal oppression. It is very easy for women's organisations (no matter how strong) to become upholders of the patriarchal order, supporting the status quo and organising more and more women to support the status quo, rather than challenging it. For this reason, in order to challenge patriarchal oppression, there must be democratic mass-based *feminist* organisation, ie organisation which struggles on the basis of strategic gender interests (as per Molyneux's definition above). Very often feminist organisations will not be tied to any particular political party or organisation, because in the scramble for power between different political organisations, gender issues usually take a back seat, or are used opportunistically and only to the extent that they draw female support or votes. However, feminist organisations in themselves aim for a revolutionary transformation of the patriarchal status quo, and as such are also political organisations.

As in countries like Canada and India, there can be a proliferation of women's organisations (including feminist organisations), which form alliances and coalitions to fight for certain issues. The key question is, what kinds of alliances must be built between women's organisations and other organisations fighting for the transformation of South African society. Active political alliances between working class organisations, political and civic organisations, women's organisations, progressive legal, health and education organisations, and other anti-apartheid organisations, are essential in the struggle for a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, socialist South Africa.

Within this framework, it is the task of women's organisations to address both strategic and practical gender interests and put them on the agenda, even the most contentious (as these will often be issues posing clear challenges to patriarchal

domination). It is also not realistic to imagine that one women's organisation can undertake all these tasks. Therefore, an urgent political task is to try to overcome the political sectarianism which has pervaded women's organisations in South Africa until today, having the effect of always pushing gender issues into the background. The existence of different women's organisations with different political perspectives needs to be welcomed instead of being regarded as threatening to particular political positions, and can form the starting-point of a broad mass-based alliance of women's organisations.

Conclusion

If we are honest with ourselves, we have to conclude that the level of organisation for the emancipation of women in South Africa is not impressive. Baleka Kgositsile, in her recent article entitled 'The Woman Question: are the chains breaking?' illustrates this and goes on to say: 'If we get over the stage where our perception of the woman's question is always blurred by the spectre of *Western feminism* then we should get on with the business of addressing the crucial question as expected and demanded of us by history' (Kgositsile, 1990:56).

We need to stop worrying about being labelled as feminists, 'the new F-word' (usually, in our context, automatically but wrongly assumed to mean a Western feminism alien to women in Africa), but, instead, work out what progressive feminism means in practice in the present-day South African context. Our fear of creating divisions in the national liberation struggle has led to the development of a women's movement which is afraid of seriously challenging patriarchal domination. This timidity comes through in the general avoidance within the mass women's movement of strategic gender interests. The political situation today requires a more assertive level of women's organisation, to guide the ANC and other progressive organisations in a more gender-conscious struggle for a new democratic South Africa.

We can look at the invaluable contribution which has been made to the national liberation struggle by an increasingly militant trade union movement fighting aggressively and unashamedly for an end to exploitation of trade union members and the wider working class (albeit without having advanced women workers' interests as effectively). A weak trade union movement, too timid to put its specific demands on the political agenda, would undoubtedly not have been in a position to make such a substantial contribution. So too, it should be in the case of women's organisation. A strong, assertive women's movement fighting aggressively and unashamedly for an end to patriarchal oppression of its members and all women in society, is not a divisive force, but an essential asset to the liberation struggle.

The May 1990 statement by the ANC NEC on the Emancipation of Women is an encouraging one. It suggests that, despite the shortcomings of the liberation movement hitherto in this regard, the subjugation of women is now going to be addressed and challenged in the course of the national liberation struggle. However,

this statement is clearly not enough by itself. It merely suggests that there is a space for women to organise for a feminist struggle as part of the national liberation struggle. Another consideration for the future, is that we are not able to be certain that the ANC will head a future government. So we have no reason to assume that a new government will have gender issues on its agenda at all (given, of course, the fairly safe assumption that it will not be a feminist government). The responsibility for this type of transformation will have to start with mass-based feminist organisations working in alliance with a broad range of women's organisations, including:

- ANC Women's Section (which may or may not at some stage become a government organisation) and women's sections of other political organisations;
- trade union women's forums (with a key responsibility for pushing the trade union movement to work for transformation of the occupational division of labour, as proposed above);
- issue-oriented feminist organisations specialising in areas such as abortion, violence against women, health, law, education, rape/sexual harassment;
- women's counselling and advice centres;
- women's recreational centres;
- informal sector women's organisations (including those hopefully to be set up as organisations with some political and economic clout, as proposed above);
- women's media/publications/education materials.

The practical tasks which have to be initiated and undertaken by these organisations I have dealt with in more detail elsewhere (Horn, 1991).

Despite a space which possibly exists for this, it does not mean that we will not stumble upon many difficulties all along the way. For example, different types of backlash, the ease with which gains can be rolled back, the seeming immovability of patriarchal attitudes on the part of both women and men. Women (feminists or otherwise), themselves constantly subject to the various influences of patriarchal ideology, easily lapse into practices and attitudes which serve to perpetuate rather than to challenge their own oppression as women. Male 'feminists' (Christine Delphy sarcastically calls them 'our friends') succeed in creating major divisions between women when they claim control or expertise over areas of feminist struggle. But none of these are good reasons for failing to take up the political task. We, therefore, need to transcend the limitations which have been present within our organisations in the repressive periods leading to the present conjuncture. Feminist organisations need to analyse the workings of patriarchal society and its effects on individual women and men, in order to democratically transcend all the confusions and hesitations which constantly hinder the struggle against patriarchal domination. For this, an alliance between feminist theoreticians and activists in organisations is of utmost importance, which must allow for critical debate between feminists. Feminist organisations need to put feminist programmes and demands on the

political agenda, and engage political organisations in serious debates on these issues. Until strategic gender interests are high on the political agenda, women's organisations are being pulled in different directions by other organisations seeking to use them for their own ends rather than engage in political processes which recognise them as independent political players. The democratic feminist organisations (in the middle of all these demands on themselves and other women's organisations) have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that their struggle remains on course.

Notes

* This article is based upon part of my paper entitled 'Towards the Emancipation of Women in a Post-Apartheid South Africa', which was delivered at the Conference on Women and Gender in Southern Africa in Durban on 1 February 1991.

1) I am not addressing this more specifically, because I am taking it for granted.

2) Kruks et al on the USSR, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mozambique, Vietnam, South Yemen, West Bengal, GDR, Hungary, South Asia; Arnfred and Urdang on Mozambique; Leaning and Molyneux on Nicaragua; Molyneux on the USSR; Sharma on India; all references on Canada and Quebec.

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