'A BIT ON THE SIDE'? : GENDER STRUGGLES IN THE POLITICS OF TRANSFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of South Africa from an apartheid order to socialism, or at least a more equitable system than the present one, has become a crucial area of debate. Academics and activists alike are engaged in a creative dialogue to formulate policies to effect the transition to a 'post-apartheid' state and to adopt forms of organisation and strategy consistent with and complementary to such policy. Until recently, however, a consideration of gender has been lacking in this exciting debate.[1] This is not simply the result of a dominant androcentric discourse, but must also be attributed to gaps and shortcomings in the analysis of women's oppression in South Africa. We argue that the way in which political organizations have conceptualized women's oppression and their role in struggle has limitations. This has implications for the way in which women participate in struggle, for the way in which women's interests and needs are addressed in the course of struggle, and for development policy in a 'post-apartheid' future. This paper is a constructive critique of the 'woman question' position, which has been adopted by the progressive movement in SA. This position is broadly based on the classical socialist position on women's oppression, viz that women's oppression will be eliminated in the course of the transition to socialism. In strategic terms, this involves women's concerns being subordinated to, rather than included *as part of*, struggles to achieve socialism in SA. Where the emphasis is on national liberation, women's struggles are likewise subsumed. We offer, as an alternative, a socialist feminist position which sees women's struggles as a legitimate and integral part of broader struggles, which transform not only the form and content of those struggles, but also the type of development policy which flows from them.

The debate around women's oppression in South Africa has become artificially and unnecessarily polarised between those who see the emancipation of women as being secondary to and contingent upon national liberation, and those who separate women's emancipation from broader concerns. The latter position manifests itself in two different ways. Radical feminists argue that the *primary* source of women's oppression lies in patriarchy, defined as a universal system of male dominance. Male domi-

nance extends not only to the public spheres of politics and the economy but also to control over women's reproductive function and their sexuality. The political programme of radical feminists is informed by the slogan 'the personal is political'. Issues associated with women's reproductive freedom such as rape, sexual harassment, battery and abortion constitute the basis of their political practice. Central to this practice is the building of exclusively female organisation. Thus autonomy for radical feminists means creating 'safe' spaces for women, from which men and masculinist political practices are excluded. In South Africa, this position has been reflected in organisations which have grown in isolation from the national liberation struggle.

Secondly, the argument has been put forward that women's organisations should be autonomous from the national liberation movement in the same way as trade unions. The reasons advanced revolve around issues of accountability and democratic practices, as well as problems of domination by petty bourgeois/male interests. It is also argued that women's demands will never be met within the national liberation movement (and the trade unions for that matter) without a suficiently strong women's movement. Such a movement can only be achieved by women organising independently in order to avoid their political practice and their political concerns being subsumed under national political demands. Whilst we agree in principle that ultimately such independence is both desirable and necessary, our research in Durban townships suggests that this form of organisation is not feasible at present, due to practical political and ideological considerations which we will discuss below. Furthermore, we do not believe that gender and class can be treated as equivalent analytical categories. We use the argument that class relations are exploitative (in the Marxian sense) whilst gender relations (like race relations) are both oppressive and contingent upon class position in the form they take. This has implications for political practice. Outside of the isolating context of the household, women, unlike workers, do not have a particular place within which they can be organised as women. Neither do they have the same weapon at their disposal as workers, namely the collective withdrawal of their labour. As a result, an autonomous women's movement modelled on an autonomous worker's movement is not practicable.

This is not to say, however, that we agree with the dominant position in South Africa which sees women's struggles as necessarily subsumed under national struggles. This position sees 'Western bourgeois feminism' as being largely irrelevant to the lives of black women in South Africa. It defines the apartheid order as being the prime enemy and its abolition as the major political task. This position argues that women are drawn into

organisation on the basis of their opposition to racism in its various forms. Hence they are seen to have 'communal' interests with men. Fighting 'women's issues' is denounced as divisive. This position has (broadly) been held by national liberation movements from Angola to Mozambique within the southern African region. For the ANC, according to Frene Ginwala:

> In South Africa, the prime issue is apartheid and national liberation. So to argue that African women should concentrate on and form an isolated feminist movement, focusing on issues of women in their narrowest sense, implies African women must fight so that they can be equally oppressed with African men. (*Work in Progress*, 45, 1986:10)

Similarly in Mozambique, Samora Machel argued:

> There are those who see emanicipation as mechanical equality between men and women. This vulgar concept is often seen among us. Here emancipation means that women and men do exactly the same tasks, mechanically dividing the household duties. 'If I wash the dishes today, you must wash them tomorrow, whether or not you are busy or have the time'. If there are still no women truck drivers or tractor drivers in FRELIMO, we must have some right away regardless of the objective and subjective conditions. As we can see from the example of the capitalist countries, this mechanically conceived emancipation leads to complaints and attitudes which utterly distort the meaning of women's emancipation. An emancipated woman is one who drinks, smokes, wears trousers, and mini skirts, who indulges in sexual promiscuity, who refuses to have children. (Machel, 1974, quoted in Kimble and Unterhalter, 1982:13)

There are more major problems in these formulations of women's oppression with regard to their definition and use of the concept 'feminism' and to the narrow limits placed on organisational priorities. The latter, of course, is in part a result of material constraints within which such movements operate. In South Africa this would include the repressive nature of state response to organisation whilst in Mozambique it would apply to the social and economic inheritance of Portuguese colonialism. However, we believe that this should not result in a fossilisation of strategies.

There is a major problem with the way in which 'feminism' has been

defined and used by national liberation movements in southern Africa as it is seen as homogeneous and thus the complexity of the feminist discourse has been lost. The tendency within national liberation movements to equate feminism with Western bourgeois feminism results in a dismissal of the insights of feminism as being irrelevant to third world women. For example, an official ANC publication argued that 'We must start now (if we have not started) to free ourselves from "male chauvinism" and its counterpart "feminism"' (*Work in Progress*, 45, 1986:10). This has resulted in a failure to engage with socialist feminism and has stultified the debate around women's oppression in South Africa.

Furthermore, within the national liberation movement it is contended that women involved in third world struggles are mobilised around issues of national oppression, or around racist practices which affect *both* men and women (Kimble, and Unterhalter, 1982). Hilda Bernstein also points out that 'the thing about South African women is that they learn about their feminism through their involvement in politics' (quoted in Ireen Dubel, 1987:5). However, while they may have political interests in common with men, South African women, like South African men, do not fight these shared struggles as natural subjects, but as *gendered* beings. We use this term specifically to underscore the fact that the social construction of gender is an element of social location and is likely to influence social identity and political action. The gendered nature of struggle is evident both in the issues men and women choose to engage in, as well as in the way in which they fight these issues. In the Durban townships during the state of emergency, for example, women were drawn into conflict because they were mothers and because the conflict had moved to their terrain. Women saw the defence of their homes and children as their responsibility. In the course of the conflict women moved beyond their 'traditional' roles in society and the household and confronted their status within and in relation to dominant political organisation.

We therefore suggest that there is in reality a middle ground between the presently polarised positions, a ground on which gendered struggles are being fought. We also suggest that the middle ground exists implicitly in the analysis of ANC spokeswomen, but it is obscured by their overriding emphasis on the mobilisation of women *for* national struggles (Dubel, 1987:7; Ginwala, 1986:10 and Kimble; and Unterhalter, 1982:33).

We argue that gender struggles are important in determining the nature and implementation of policy. Moreover we seek to demonstrate that gender-neutral policy is a myth. Gender struggles, which we define as attempts either to change or maintain gender relations, exist and must be recognised. In arguing for a middle ground we are asserting the importance of

feminism and particularly socialist feminism as a political discourse and practice which has the potential to rescue women's struggles from being 'a bit on the side' to making them struggles which can substantively alter the nature of national and class struggles and so transform gender relations.

THE MIDDLE GROUND

Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter (1982) make the point that there has been mutual criticism between what can broadly be labelled Western feminism and the 'woman question' in national liberation movements. They argue:

> .. women of the ex-colonial world have seen much of the substance of (Western feminists') struggles as irrelevant to them. Women struggling to liberate themselves from the burden of oppression by imperialism - a burden which manifests itself in extreme ways through poverty, disease and genocide - appear to find little point of comparison between their own goals and the goals of Western women (1982:12).

Despite this, they correctly argue that there will be specific differences between struggles 'as identified by the participants themselves' and urge Western feminists not to 'ignore, condemn or exaggerate those differences'. We would go further to say that women in national liberation struggles should not fall into the trap of artificially positing a polarisation between feminism (currently dismissed as an exclusively Western phenomenon) and the struggles of women in national liberation movements. To do this is to accept static categories, to ignore the development of both historical materialist and feminist ideas as historical processes, and to create an unnecessary dichotomy between theory and practice.

Socialist feminism, while not having the rich intellectual and political history of Marxism, is the hybrid product of growing experience in women's struggles and research, *both in the west and in the third world.* It represents a consensus that women's struggles against both capitalism and sexism cannot be separated from issues of class, race and imperialism. The class reductionist or economistic analysis of orthodox Marxism is unacceptable. Socialist feminism, as it has been conceived in the West, is not applicable in its entirety to the third world. For example, the insistence upon an autonomous women's movement does not necessarily have resonance in the third world.

> Women in the third world, in Africa, Asia and Latin America, are exploited internationally, nationally and personally as women and

> it is very difficult for us to separate the international oppression, national and personal oppression ... . For women in the West, because maybe they are not exploited internationally because they live in the West ... concentrate on the personal and the sexual. They separate it from the political. So the main difference is that we politicised feminists of the third world, we make feminism a political issue (Nawall el Sa'adawi, 1985).

Black feminists have asserted that socialist feminism in the past has paid insufficient attention to the question of racism (for example Bhavani and Coulson, 1986; Bourne, 1983; Carby, 1982; Hooks, 1986; and Thornton Dill, 1983). Nevertheless socialist feminist discourse in the West has been informed and altered itself, by the examples and challenges of women in the Third World. Therefore it should not be posed in constant contra-distinction to third world women's struggles.

The influence of women's struggles in the third world has been particularly creative in this process. Based on combined insights of *both* third world and Western feminists, a socialist feminism pertinent to South Africa can be achieved. We agree with Kimble and Unterhalter (1982) that the organisational context is of prime importance and that in South Africa the struggle for national liberation determines that context. Calls for the absolute autonomy of women's organisations in South Africa are meaningless. The majority of South African women see struggles as being fought on behalf of 'their whole people'. As such, women's organisation divorced from other forms of political organisation is inconceivable. However, this precludes neither the influence of feminism on these struggles (historically and currently) nor the articulation of women's needs as part of the struggle to transform social relations.

Jayawardena, in her consideration of feminist and nationalist struggles in the third world, argues that:

> ... feminism was not imposed on the Third World by the West, but rather that historical circumstances produced important material and ideological changes that affected women, even though the impact of imperialism and Western thought was admittedly among the significant elements in these historical circumstances ... . In a way, the fact that movements for emancipation and feminism flourished in several non-European countries ... has been 'hidden from history' (1986:2-3).

We can also see this in South Africa at specific points in the history

of resistance. The impact of colonialism, the mining revolution, struggles around Union and, most particularly, resistance to the 1913 Land Act, led to the formation of the ANC and the Bantu Women's League (BWL). Like the ANC, the leadership of the BWL was dominated by petty bourgeois elements. This is reflected in their identification with the British suffrage movement and in their calls for 'votes for women' as part of their anti-pass campaign (Wells, 1982). As with the ANC, women's organisations did not remain locked in bourgeois or legalistic demands. During the course of the twentieth century, as the size and composition of their membership changed, they were propelled into participation in worker and popular struggles and to demands for national liberation, epitomised by them as campaigns of the 1950s. The feminist content of these struggles (in other words the gendered nature of these struggles and the gender struggles that accompanied them), has not been taken up by political organisations, nor has the importance of women's organisation for articulating women's demands been recognised.

The pass campaigns of the 1950s are particularly illustrative of the gendered way in which national struggles were fought. These struggles appeared to have a genderless content. In other words, women and men fought the imposition of passes together, on the basis of their dehumanising character. However, the women's anti-pass campaign reflected a struggle against both economic marginalisation as well as against more personal assaults on women as mothers and wives and on their sexuality. While these struggles were not articulated in feminist terms, they reflected the material basis of women's oppression and exploitation under apartheid. In the writing of this history, the mobilisation of women in their capacities as wives and mothers has been emphasised, while the material basis of their demands is obscured. (Walker 1985)[2]

Uncritical acceptance of the notion of 'the family' is problematic. The anti-pass campaigns were, of course, concerned with the destruction of the family. This, however, was not a concern for the destruction of a nuclear or even extended family, but for the destruction of extended family relationships within the context of a community (Dubel, 1987:39). It is worth emphasising that the defence of the family, apart from its moral and emotional aspects, also had a strong economic dimension. The substance of women's demands, ie their right to work in the cities and/or their access to their husbands' earnings has not been adequately theorised and built upon in practice.

The failure to confront the gendered content of these campaigns and the gender struggles within them arises partially from the fact that these struggles have been located within the 'woman question' tradition. This

sees women's liberation as dependent upon socialist transformation. In the struggle towards this end women's participation is acknowledged as important but their concerns have to be subordinated to national issues. In seeking to legitimise women's struggles and to put women's demands on the agenda of the national liberation movement, those adopting a 'woman question' position have emphasised the strategic value of women's involvement. Whilst we would agree that the organisation of women is a strategic necessity, there has been a tendency for women in national liberation struggles to become 'just another sector' to be mobilised.

There are two ways of conceptualising and building upon the strategic importance of women to struggle: that which was developed by Vladimir Lenin and that developed by Clara Zetkin. According to Lenin:

> We derive our organisational ideas from our ideological conceptions. We want no separate organisations of communist women! She who is a Communist belongs as a member to the party, just as he who is a Communist. They have the same rights and duties. There can be no difference of opinion on that score. However, we must not shut our eyes to the facts. The party must have organs - working groups, commissions, committees, sections or whatever else they may be called - with the specific purpose of rousing the broad masses of women, bringing them into contact with the Party and keeping them under its influence. This naturally requires that we carry on systematic work among the women. We must teach the awakened women, win them over for the proletarian class struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party, and equip them for it ... . We must have our own groups to work among them, special methods of agitation, and special forms of organisation. This is not bourgeois 'feminism'; it is a practical revolutionary expedience (Tucker, 1975:695).

Zetkin, on the other hand, argues that:

> When the party reaches out to women, it must treat them as political beings. In the short as well as the long run, the socialist revolution needs women's creative participation at least as much as working-class women need full liberation ... the involvement of the great mass of proletarian women in the emancipatory struggle of the proletariat is one of the pre-conditions for the victory of the socialist idea, for the construction of a socialist society (Zetkin, 'Nur mit der proletarischen Fraw wird der Sozialismus siegen!' quoted in Vogel, 1982:113).

What emerges from the formulations of Lenin, arising out of his recognition of the strategic implications of organising women, is that a one-way relationship between the party and women's organisation is envisaged (ie a top-down relationship). Zetkin, on the other hand, demonstrates a subtle but important difference in emphasis in that she sees a two-way relationship between 'the great mass of proletarian women' and the party. In practice, Zetkin's emphasis on dialectical process has not been picked up. As a result, the material foundation of women's oppression and the mechanisms by which women's needs arising out of this can be met, have been ignored. The emphasis on the *strategic* importance of women's organisation for the national struggle leads to a rejection of autonomous women's organisation. Thus Zetkin's insistence that 'the fight for changes in the relations between women and men (should be seen) as a task for the present, not for some indefinite socialist future' (Vogel, 1983:133) is lost. As Vogel points out:

> A socialist movement that uncritically supports existing forms of working-class family life, or only perfunctorily addresses the problem of female subordination, risks alienating more than half its activists and allies. Conversely, popular movements that vigorously confront male chauvinism and oppose women's oppression have the potential to lay the groundwork for a future society in which the real social equality of women and men can be built (1983:171).

It is often implied that this is a preoccupation of socialist feminists in the West and that it is not a concern of women's struggles in the third world. In southern African revolutions, the organisation of women has been seen in Leninist terms as being of strategic importance for the success of the revolution, particularly given the guerrilla form that those struggles have taken. (Machel 1973) In this regard, Mozambique has generally been heralded as having developed the most progressive stance on the involvement of women; indeed, the active engagement of women in Mozambique politics in the independence period has been noteworthy. However, the work of Signe Arnfred (1986) has shown that it is not sufficient to simply acknowledge that women are oppressed and exploited as women. She argues that the recognition of gender struggles is a fundamental revolutionary task.

This is not merely a semantic problem or a preoccupation of Western feminism, but has implications for both the nature of women's participation in national liberation struggles and also for the reconstruction phase. Recent analyses of the problems of reconstruction in Mozambique have shown

the effects of a top-down relationship with respect to women's organisation. Arnfred has shown that in the liberated zones of Mozambique, women gained ground because 'their independence of patriarchal authority was needed for the tasks of war'. However, she points to the historical limitations of 'the learnings of the armed struggle' (1986:1). Because they were not analysed in feminist terms, it was not possible to build on these gains. In another context, it has been pointed out that:

> The mobilisation of women during the struggle that is necessary to gain national liberation is usually annulled after this has been achieved, and the number of women who continue to participate in political power, in theorisation and in decision-making, is very small. One reason for this is the fact that although women participated in *struggles* in large numbers, they left the development of *theory* and of *strategy* to the male experts (Maria Mies, 1982:9 our emphasis).

It is the very importance of theorising political struggles in gender terms which makes it necessary to take issue with the 'woman question' position. In doing so we are not advocating women's organisation in a way that is incompatible with the aims and objectives of the national liberation struggle. However, we are arguing for sufficient autonomy to allow women to develop their own political programmes and to play a meaningful role in the broader movement. We would argue further that their democratic participation in the broader movement should serve to transform the national liberation struggle itself.

Whilst the 'woman question' position points to the coherence of women's demands and those of the national struggle, what it ignores is the *gendered content* of these demands. For example, the preface to the Policy Document of the United Women's Organisation (UWO) of the Western Cape states that:

> We feel that oppression in South Africa cannot be wholly removed without removing the oppression of women. Only in the wider setting of fundamental rights for all can we hope to achieve our own important goal. We cannot abstract ourselves from political issues, for they are our daily life, the roof over the heads of our families, the food in the stomachs of our children. Our place must be as part of the struggle for fundamental rights (Adopted as policy at the First UWO Conference on 5th April 1981 and amended at the Second UWO Conference on 4th April 1982).

It is precisely because women bear the prime responsibility for managing the household that issues like prices, housing and General Sales Tax (GST) are as important to women as wages.

The 'woman question' position fails to ask *why it is* that these are women's demands and how these related to women's oppression. It is precisely in the linking of women's struggles to the source of their oppression that feminist content can be injected. We can learn the dangers of a lack of awareness of gender struggle as a means for changing gender relations from the Mozambican experience. Whilst FRELIMO called for socialist gender relations, neither it nor the organisation of Mozambican Women (OMM) acknowledged the necessity of gender struggles to achieve this. In Arnfred's terms, the concept of gender struggle has not been an 'operational concept' in FRELIMO's political analysis (1986:23). The implications of this for socialist development policy will be spelt out in the last section of the paper. In the following section we attempt to draw out the implications for organisations' struggles for social change.

WOMEN AND POLITICAL ORGANISATION IN DURBAN

After the 1973 strikes in Durban and the student uprisings throughout the country in 1976, there was a renewed emphasis on mass mobilisation in South Africa. This was strengthened by the growth of community and youth organisations in African, Indian and coloured working class areas. In Durban, in addition to the issues shared at national level (such as school and consumer boycotts), local campaigns were fought around rent increases and hikes in transport costs. In the African townships, organisations such as the Joint Rent Action Committee (JORAC) mobilised people against incorporation into the KwaZulu bantustan. Many of these struggles were sparked off by real declines in living standards (Sutcliffe, 1986), which affected women especially and in a particular way. This was epitomised by the slogan 'asinamali' (we have no money). Because women are responsible for the management of the household, struggles against rises in the cost of living had a real appeal for them.

It is significant too, that they identified the root of their problems as lying in state policy. As such, the struggles involved confronting not only the Port Natal Administration Board (the institution responsible for the running of the 'Natal townships' at that time), but also Inkatha and the central state. Inkatha's attempts to control the Natal townships by incorporating them into KwaZulu became a key area of conflict (involving women on both sides of the political fence). In 1983, women from Lamontville, organised by JORAC, confronted the central state directly by travelling to Cape Town to put forward their demands to Parliament.

These actions are significant in our attempt to understand women's struggles in terms broader than those offered by the 'woman question' position. Clearly women *were* involved in issues of national significance and their struggles had strategic importance. However, their demands were also *gendered* ones, relating to their productive and reproductive roles. This aspect of their struggle tended to be obscured in subsequent political developments. Although women participated in these struggles and were dominant in the management of some of the campaigns, political leadership ultimately fell into the hands of men. Increasingly, mass meetings became the key means of reaching the people and consolidating the campaigns. At this level, women were severely handicapped. Women lacked the confidence and the skills to address large gatherings. An important contribution of feminism has been to show how women's socialisation renders them ill-prepared for high-profile roles in political (and other) organisations. Whilst they participated confidently in the day-to-day activities of community organisations, they were significantly absent from the platform at mass meetings. This was further compounded by the inability of many women to speak English with the degree of fluency required for public meetings conducted in English. These structural constraints on women's participation have not always been recognised by popular organisations despite their attempts to extend popular democracy. By contrast, NOW's branch structure and the practice of translating back and forth from Zulu to English in general meetings has facilitated women's participation.

Following the formation of the UDF in August 1983, the major focus of popular organisation became the campaign against the tri-cameral parliament. The new constitution aimed at a limited incorporation of Indians and coloureds into the structures of government. The campaign to win 'the hearts and minds' of the Indians became Natal-based, mainly because it was the home of the majority of Indians in South Africa. The anti-election campaign of 1984 revitalised the Natal Indian Congres (NIC) and pushed it to prominence within the UDF in Natal. As a result of their increasing strength, the NIC and other UDF leaders suffered great harassment at the hands of the state. Following a successful application against their detention orders, six of the UDF leaders occupied the British Consulate in Durban, which achieved great publicity both locally and internationally, and drew attention away from the opening of the new tri-cameral parliament.

In 1984 twelve UDF leaders were arrested and subsequently placed on trial for treason. The trial lasted for over a year before all were acquitted. An inevitable consequence of this was that the energies and resources of the UDF and its affiliates were diverted into high-publicity political strategies. (This served to draw attention away from political

issues founded on material needs and as such, close to the hearts of women.) In retrospect, it seems that the material demands expressed in the campaigns in the townships in the early 1980s were lost. This had a specific effect on women, particularly in Natal, which requires explanation.

At the end of 1983, as the culmination of years of hard work and debate, women in the region formed NOW. It was formed at the height of mass mobilisation politics and in the context of growing state repression. This particular context had repercussions both for the organisation of women within NOW and for its relationship with the UDF. Within the organisation itself, women were encouraged to rally around broad political campaigns rather than around those that would build on women's material demands. Furthermore, suggestions brought by women in NOW to the UDF to take up issues such as GST hikes, could not be tackled because of the pressures on the leadership due to the treason trial. In addition to this there were more general problems associated with organising women politically, such as their isolation in the home or in domestic service, and the burdens on women's time created by their responsibilities for housework and childcare (usually in addition to wage labour). All this prevented NOW from developing and consolidating a strong base among women in the townships. Despite these problems associated with formal women's organisation, women continued to organize in the townships. In addition to state repression, the UDF and its affiliates in townships faced opposition from Inkatha, which saw in the UDF a direct threat to its attempts to establish its hegemony in Natal. Consequently, struggles at the local level centred on battles between Inkatha and the UDF. The central terrains in this battle were education, in particular Inkatha's opposition to the use of the boycott tactic in KwaZulu schools, local government, and the proposed incorporation of certain townships into KwaZulu. The increasing spiral of violence surrounding these issues culminated in the conflagration of August 1985 and the subsequent extension of the state of emergency to Natal.

Ironically, this brought the struggle more directly back to women's terrain. In 1986, we with others examined the role of women in struggle in the Durban townships in the period August 1985 to August 1986 (Beall et al, 1987). We suggested that women had become crucially involved in struggle, particularly in those townships falling outside of KwaZulu. In the process they gained strength and confidence. We argued further that they had become so centrally involved because the struggle had moved on to women's terrain, viz the defence of children and home. It is worth retracing the lines of this argument at some length.

The violence in Durban was sparked off by the death of Victoria Mxenge.

That *this* should have led to such widespread reaction is significant for an understanding of the role of women in struggle. Victoria was perceived as important because she was the widow of murdered lawyer-activist Griffiths Mxenge and a defence lawyer in the Natal treason trial which was in process at the time of her death. She was also an executive member of the NOW and was on the regional executive of the UDF itself. As a result, she acquired symbolic status in the area as 'mother of the nation'. We argued that 'it was this peculiar knot of gender construction which explains the extent of reaction to her murder' (Beall et al, 1987). Moreover, it is ironic that it was her stepping out of her traditional role as a woman which made Victoria such a high-profile figure. This irony is reflected in a similar but less defined way in the lives of township women who have become involved in struggle.

For previously unpoliticised women their children's battle over education was one impetus for their involvement in struggle. There were schools boycotts motivated by dissatisfaction with KwaZulu education (for example the campaign for free school books) as well as boycotts commemorating Victoria Mxenge's death and those in response to national trends. This led not only to repression but to a dislocation in family life. According to a teacher at a high school in KwaMashu:

> When the state of emergency was declared, those very people (pupils/activists) had to go into hiding and they didn't appear at school much ... they couldn't be found at their homes and it was discovered that they were just moving around, you know, from home to home, and not being found in one particular place ... . (Interview with S, 9/12/86).

This was exacerbated by the movement of troops into the townships and the appearance of vigilante groups which became the basis for the increasingly direct involvement of women in township struggles against Inkatha and the state's security forces. This involvement was not uniform but took different forms depending on the conditions in the various townships. Nevertheless, women's involvement was rooted in common conceptions of women's roles and attributes. This has been recognised in assessing women's strategic importance in such struggles but we believe it is important to go beyond this. While many of women's roles were defined in 'traditional' ways, in the process of struggle women moved beyond these narrow definitions.

In townships where the conflict centred on the presence of troops in the schools, women (as mothers and teachers) were drawn in as mediators. At

Lamontville High School, for example, there was un unprovoked teargassing and sjamboking of pupils by the security forces. Women teachers put themselves in the frontline. As one teacher related the incident:

> A white policeman approached. I then shouted to him 'look what you people have done'. He replied 'if you cannot take care of your children we will do the job for you ...' . When we reached the gate the policeman who was with me was joined by another white policeman. They yelled to the Port Natal black policemen that they must go back and hit some children who were running away ... . I then opened my arms and physically forced these policemen to go back. There were about 15 of them. I was so angry I told them they could shoot me or leave as I wanted them to do ... . After that ... they instructed all the police to withdraw (Black Sash Affidavit M, 6/9/85).

The decision that women teachers should intervene was not merely an emotional response based on women's 'maternal instinct' but was also as revealed, by another teacher interviewed, a conscious tactic. The teachers decided to confront the security forces with the women in front and the men behind. 'It was felt they would not shoot if we did this ... this works if women are in front. We believe it works' (Interview with N, 12/11/86). It is the very immunity offered to women by customary definitions of femininity and womanhood which was exploited and which enabled women to play such a prominent role. At the same time, their actual involvement has laid the basis for a transformation in these traditional definitions.

Women responded in a similar way in Chesterville where, in addition to security force harrassment, attacks occurred on homes of UDF members at the hands of vigilantes. When the attacks on UDF members began, many men and boys were forced to leave their homes and go into hiding, in genuine fear for their lives (a position which women did not share, in part because of their immunity from direct physical violence). In this situation, women faced a number of pressures because of their role as homemakers. These pressures included constant visits from police or the SADF looking for the women's husbands or children, visits in which they were frequently physically and verbally abused. Women also spent long periods alone at home while the rest of the family were in hiding, subject to visits, threatening telephone calls and in constant fear of attack. Others had to house an ever-growing number of refugees. What must be emphasised is that these pressures were in addition to women's already over-burdened tasks of maintaining the household. From our interviews it seems that in the econo-

mic recession women are very often the sole breadwinners in a household, either because they are single or widowed or because their husbands and children are unemployed. This, combined with political pressures, leads to a politicisation of women's domestic role. A woman from Chesterville township said:

> Those in the community with houses near the A-Team[3] have become refugees in the township and they are occupying the homes of others. That makes women rise up as when people have left their homes there are sometimes 30 people who are sleeping in one three-roomed house. Many are out of employment and have nothing to eat ... that is why the mothers have decided to form the women's group in Chesterville, to fight these things (Interview with R, 21/11/86).

Women in Chesterville organised themselves in order to protect their children and their homes from attacks by vigilantes. They held all-night vigils and for a while they were able to stave off the violence. In so doing, they drew not only on their own immunity but also on the greater immunity experienced by white women on the basis of their race. The Black Sash women joined the township women in these vigils, identifying with their concerns as mothers thus demonstrating the potential for solidarity (*not* sisterhood) amongst women of different backgrounds on the basis of their gender and a shared political commitment. The terms of such solidarity have to be determined on the ground, by the women involved, especially given the race and class differences of the women and the spatial separation this entails. A Black Sash woman, for example, said she was consumed with guilt that she could escape the horrors of Chesterville by retreating into the comfort and safety of the white suburb in which she lived (Interview with W, 15/11/86).

As we argued in the earlier paper, this points to a potentially radical, perhaps revolutionary, meaning of motherhood. It is worth restating this at some length:

> The movement of troops into the townships and the activities of the vigilantes touched women in a particular way. The site of struggle shifted to the home and the community, into a sphere in which women have particular responsibility and which they felt particularly obliged to defend. Clearly these perceptions are socially constructed: the home is traditionally regarded as the women's domain, and the care of children is 'women's work'.

> The women we interviewed saw these roles in communal, rather than individual terms. Biological parenthood is not the only kind of parenthood in the townships. Women feel a social obligation as mothers to all children in the neighbourhood. This may in part be explained by material conditions in the townships, where women who work entrust their children to the care of relatives and neighbours. This sense of communal responsibility provided an imperative for women's active involvement (Beall *et al*, 1987).

Thus women's terrain was extended beyond the isolation of individual households into the neighbourhood and community.

We have dealt thus far with the involvement of women in their capacity as mothers and mediators, and have shown the link between this and the struggles of the youth. Clearly this does not apply to all women: there is a generational difference in the way in which and the extent to which women are involved in struggle. This is not exclusive to South Africa. A study done amongst Catholic women in Northern Ireland also demonstrated a greater propensity for mothers and older women to support political campaigns and to become involved in them along with, or on behalf of, their children (Fairweather et al, 1984).

While our interviews pointed to the extension of the nurturant and mediating roles of older women in their participation in struggles, the position of younger women is less clear. We know, for example that in the youth and student organisations young girls are constrained both because of their greater responsibility for household labour than their brothers (and parental fear for their safety), and because of the attitude of their male comrades. It was said of the Student Representative Council at one of the KwaMashu schools:

> Meetings are called by the SRC and only the boys are invited to those meetings. When you question why the girls are not there, the boys will say it's because the girls can't keep important information to themselves ... . Even if they fight it in the classroom, they still have to go home and do the household chores that are especially set aside for girls. In fact, girls are often complaining about it, you know, that they have to study just as much as the boys but the boys get very few chores to do around the home. I mean, girls will sometimes end up even ironing the boys' shirts for school (Interview with S, 9/12/86).

While we found it comparatively easy to understand the role of older

women in township struggles, it was more difficult to ascertain the role of young working women. Caine and Jaffee (1986) have suggested in their survey of the PWV region, that women were politicised on the factory floor and that they brought this politicisation into the townships. Perhaps for reasons of regional differentiation, we have not found similar patterns in Durban townships. This may in part be explained by the fact that in the Durban region, an extraordinarily high proportion of African women are employed in domestic service (70% in domestic service compared to 42% in the 'service sector' nationally in 1980) (Meer, 1983). Moreover, of the approximately 8% of African women who are employed in manufacturing in the Durban-Pinetown industrial complex some 53% are in the 21-30 age group and in declining proportions thereafter (Meer, 1983). It would seem, therefore, that women's experience of trade union organisation has not been as significant a politicising force as in the townships of the PWV area.

It is clear then, that the major site for organising African women in Durban at present is in the townships in general and in 'the family' in particular. This in itself raises important questions for socialist feminists given the conventional socialist demand for the abolition of the family. Western socialist feminists have seen the family as a repressive apparatus of capital and the state. However, as women in the third world have consistently argued and as Hazel Carby (1982) pointed out with reference to the black family in the United States, the family can also function as a site of resistance, for example during periods of slavery, colonialism and under authoritarian regimes.

Depending on the context and political discourse within which the family is located, it can have a progressive or conservative effect. As the National Family Programme (*Financial Mail*, 1986) suggests, the state is well aware of this and is attempting to constitute the family as a foundation for social control.In Beall et al (1987), we discussed at some length Inkatha's constitution of the family in a conservative discourse. We argued that the role of Inkatha women as mothers was predominantly one of disciplining their children but from a position subordinate to the men within the household. We further argued that patterns of domination within the 'traditional family' provided a model for the legitimation of Inkatha's hierarchical structure and authoritarianism. Within this rigid structure, the Inkatha Women's Brigade (IWB) plays a subordinate role in both public life and in decision-making, rather like the role of women within the conservative family. This relationship between the IWB and Inkatha itself caricatures the top-down approach to organising women. For example, when in 1979 the Women's Brigade came under the 'direction and control of His Excellency the President of Inkatha', this was not questioned by the execu-

tive committee of the Women's Brigade but was warmly supported (Resolution of Women's Brigade, 1979). This narrow conservatism has denied women the space to redefine their roles personally and to determine the nature and extent of their involvement in politics.

A conservative but active definition of women's roles in society can be used to channel their political energies away from progressive and feminist directions (Wieringa, 1985). Because women's roles within the household are the very roles by which they accord themselves value, it is relatively easy to organise women around these issues or activities. This is most frequently done within a conservative discourse. Progressive and feminist women's organisations have often failed to recognise the value women place on their roles as wives, mothers and homemakers and have thus lost opportunities for engaging with popular consciousness in a critical and creative way.

In contrast to Inkatha and its Women's Brigade, the relationship between the UDF and NOW is less hierarchical and less structured. Despite tensions between women's issues and the national question in the UDF, greater democracy has 'created spaces for women to formulate local responses to issues and to direct strategy' (Beall et al, 1987). An important difference between the relationship of women's organisation to the UDF and the IWB to Inkatha is precisely this greater autonomy in the choice of issues to be fought and the manner in which they are fought. Whilst they have not overtly taken up their oppression as women, there is a greater potential for the transformation of women's roles within the UDF. Because the UDF is not dependent on the manipulation of family structures to legitimate its control, these structures and the roles of women within them remain open to redefinition.

South African women sometimes choose to remain single because of the implications marriage has for household labour, access to and control over income as well as personal and political freedom. This has implications for the way in which women get involved in organisation. June Nala points to the effects of these factors in trade union organisation:

> The sense of responsibility of women to the family often contributed to their strength. Most of the women were single mothers without any income ... . Since it was their only source of income, the need to improve it increased their determination to fight for better wages and working conditions (1987:10).

Thus, while remaining single imposes economic hardships on women, it does allow them the space to take greater control of their lives and their

involvement in political and economic struggles. The UDF has not intervened in the process, leaving space for gender struggles. It is important that these gender struggles be accepted and reinforced as part of the revolutionary process.

Even if gender struggles are not recognised at the organisational level, women engaged in struggle are aware of the contradictory nature of 'the family' and are in effect attempting to redefine its form. Vogel suggests with reference to the family under capitalist social relations in the West:

> On the one hand, family life in capitalist society is generally characterized by male supremacy and women's oppression, producing tensions and conflict that may further fragment an already divided working class. On the other hand, families constitute important supportive institutions within working-class communities, offering meaning and warmth to their members, and potentially providing a base for opposition or attempts by the capitalist class to enforce or extend its economic, political, or ideological domination. In other words, the family is neither wholly a pillar of defense and solidarity for the working class, as some socialists would have it, nor an institution so torn by internal struggle and male domination that it must be abolished, as some socialist feminists might argue (1983:171).

It is important that this is borne in mind in redefining social relations in a future South Africa for three reasons: firstly so that 'ideal' social institutions such as the male-headed, nuclear family are not imposed, either at the ideological or organisational level; secondly so that progressive forms of social organisation as they arise out of resistance are not lost; and thirdly so that women's demands (which are often the real demands of 'their whole people') are not forgotten.

What we have tried to show from this micro-study is that women *do* get involved in struggle, but in a gendered way. The needs that they articulate and the demands that they put forward frequently reflect the material needs of the oppressed people in general. Women's struggles rarely detract from national struggles (Jayawardena, 1986). On the contrary, the danger is that if movements fail to take cognisance of the gendered nature of women's involvement in struggles and of their demands, feminist issues get left by the wayside. Women gain strength through struggle, but do not use it for themselves. In a number of post-revolutionary countries, while women have been crucially involved in struggle, their visions of gender equality are not realised either at political or economic level. We

suggest that there are three reasons for this: firstly, that women's struggles are not articulated and incorporated in a way which empowers women; secondly, as organisation becomes more formalised and centralised, the two-way process between women organising on the ground and the level of political decision-making becomes distorted; thirdly, states have tended to tackle gender oppression primarily at the legal and ideological level, ignoring basic material demands. They have not realised the extent to which gender-relations are influenced by economic development policy. It is this consideration which forms the bulk of the final section of the paper.

THE MYTH OF GENDER-NEUTRAL POLICY

We argued in our introduction that there has been an unnecessary polarisation between feminism and the 'woman question' position. This has resulted, in most socialist countries, in women's concerns being seen as a separate issue, somehow independent of development policy. In South Africa, the concept of 'triple oppression' represents an attempt to overcome this conceptual problem. The clearest conceptualisation of the experiential unity of race, class and gender oppression at the theoretical level has been demonstrated by Deborah Gaitskell et al (1983). Our research has confirmed this reality. We acknowledge that this integration is easier to achieve with the advantage of hindsight, but nevertheless argue that it is an important task when looking towards the future. A major obstacle to this task, however, is the tendency at the level of formal politics and policy to separate and prioritise the three aspects of women's oppression. The following formulation illustrates our contention:

> Our women have never accepted the conception of legalistic and social reforms and demands. In our society women have never made a call for the recognition of their rights as women, but always put the aspirations of the whole African and other oppressed people of our country first (Mavis Nhlapo, ANC Women's Secretariat, quoted in Kimble and Unterhalter, 1982:13).

Ironically, this formulation is not dissimilar to that of bourgeois feminism in that it separates women's concerns from their material base in society. This position is also similar to that held by a number of liberation movements and post-revolutionary governments which adhere to the 'woman question' position. The bourgeois feminist notion that discrimination against women and their lack of involvement in the public sphere is the source of oppression is not unlike the way in which women's issues are

dealt with in countries undergoing a socialist transition. Here, the emphasis is on the participation of women in the 'revolutionary tasks' and on the removal of 'incorrect attitudes' through education and legal reforms. Thus, women's issues are largely treated at the ideological level, ignoring their relationship to the material base. In consequence, gender is treated as 'a bit on the side', outside of the main thrust of development policy. Our aim in this section of the paper is to argue that gender should be seen as integral to social organisation and policy considerations and to demonstrate how this might be achieved, ie by taking into account gender relations within the household.

Our argument stems from the view that women's specific oppression is *materially* based, that is, that it arises in part from their responsibility for necessary labour (or that part of it which concerns the reproduction of labour power, and reproduction in the sense of daily maintenance - ie that which is normally termed domestic labour) and from the relations of production of necessary labour. Hence, apart from their oppression as workers (where women are incorporated into the labour force), they face the burden of work in the 'private' sphere, and the isolation and invisibility associated with such work. Any development policy will *necessarily* have an influence on necessary labour within the household - on its amount, the way it is performed, and who performs it.

In socialist countries, however, while there is a recognition of the *problem* of domestic labour and the fact that it affects women's involvement in production, and in public life, the tendency has been to attempt to treat the issue of gender (or more often, the issue of *women*) primarily at the level of attitudes and legal changes. Women's position is often seen as the result of 'backward' attitudes, of 'mysticism' and 'obscurantism' (Organization of Angolan Women, 1984). This ignores the extent to which 'attitudes' are informed by material practice and, moreover, the extent to which these practices are informed by policy. Hence, while countries such as Cuba and Nicaragua have attempted to introduce such 'progressive' policies as family codes in which men are *legally* required to take responsibility for their share of housework, these policies have failed to alter gender relations within the household (or even more narrowly, the burden of housework) since the type of economic policy pursued made this impossible.

In choosing development paths, countries in the transition to socialism make their decisions on the basis of a number of factors and material conditions which are not of their choosing. Hence, countries like China and the Soviet Union had to engage in primitive accumulation in order to develop the productive forces sufficiently to provide the material base for socialism. Many smaller countries following a socialist development path

are forced to remain integrated in the international economy in a disadvantaged position. Moreover, most socialist countries have had to face external threats, which has forced them into choosing guns above butter. These factors have forced a development path on to many countries in the transition to socialism, which puts growth above redistribution, more specifically, above redistributive policy which benefits women. This is not to suggest that growth and redistribution are necessarily mutually exclusive. Where redistributive policy is an integral part of development strategy (rather than merely aid or 'handouts'), it can be used to broaden a country's economic base as well as to develop its human resources.

In the earlier phases of transition, some countries have attempted to follow more redistributive policies. In Cuba, for example, by drawing on existing reserves such as nationalised land and capital, redistribution via the formula 'to each according to his (sic) need' was made possible. This had positive effects for women in that, in a genuine attempt to address their needs, the burden on women as managers of the household was also alleviated. Consumption soared as a result of attempts to lower the cost of living, for example through lowering rents and electricity charges. At the same time, the burden of household labour was alleviated through improvements to housing, for example the replacement of dirt floors with cement, by providing latrines, water and electricity, and by the collectivisation of some domestic tasks such as childcare and laundry work (Nazzari, 1983:251).

Economic crises caused by external factors as well as internal problems, however, led to 'an increased awareness of general inefficiency and low productivity' (Nazzari, 1983:253). In the dramatic economic adjustments which the shift away from moral incentives entailed, women's position declined markedly. The new policy emphasised productivity rises, achieved partially through the diminution of the social wage. This had gendered effects. Given the persistence of nuclear and extended family relations, the shift in emphasis from the social wage to the maxim 'to each according to his (sic) work' had an impact on gender relations within the household. Rather than accepting the social wage as given, women were now forced to provide for the household either by extracting income from their husbands, and/or by entering into wage labour. This latter consequence was partially the intended effect of policy.

In order to encourage women to enter into wage labour, the state attempted to intervene in household relations by introducing legal reforms. This is the context of the much heralded 1975 Family Code. However, household relations themselves reflected the new policy. Women were integrated into production on an unequal basis (with lower skills, in less responsible

positions and therefore at lower pay). Factories were required to give *women* paid maternity leave for a certain period of time. The cost of this was to be borne by the factory itself. This made managers wary of employing women, particularly in more highly skilled and highly paid positions. As under capitalism, women were seen as *unreliable* workers since they would be absent more often than men due to their responsibility for sick children, etc. These problems enforced the sexual division of labour in which women were relegated to the less skilled and most poorly remunerated positions (no doubt attitudes did play a part here too). Since women earned less than their husbands, their ability to *effect* the provisions of the Family Code such as shared responsibility for housework, was reduced, ie their incomes affected the gender relations *within* the household.

This raises the implications of a productionist bias in policy for gender relations, insofar as it involves a trade off of present for future consumption. In any society, however, a surplus has to be produced and expanded if one is not to socialise poverty. The issue, therefore, is the way in which different kinds of labour are values and rewarded. As Vogel points out:

> In a society not characterized by class exploitation, ... according to Marx, surplus labour is identified by the nature of its contribution to social reproduction, not by the fact that it is privately appropriated ... . For Marx, necessary labor in such a society seems to be simply that labor 'whose product is directly consumed individually by the producers and their families'. The labor that contributes to the reproduction of labor power is not in antagonistic contradiction, furthermore, with the production of a surplus (1983:172).

During a transitionary phase, therefore, the attempt to achieve a 'progressive reduction of the disproportionate burden on women of domestic labor' (Vogel, 1983:173) through policy which does not preferentially remunerate visible labour in production is important.

In South Africa, various authors have argued for a redistributive policy in the transition period (Freund, 1986; SAERT, 1986; Black and Stanwix, 1986). This would benefit the economy by extending the internal market and would be of advantage to the working class by extending the social wage. It is clear that a radical redistributive policy has considerable potential to benefit women since it can not only increase the social wage but also reduce domestic labour. For socialist feminists, the content of the policy and how it is implemented are important. There are a number of aspects to

this. Broadly, we need to trace through the effects of policy on the burden of domestic labour and on gender relations within the household.

If a redistributive policy means an increase in the social wage, then precisely what constitutes the social wage becomes important. For example, a national health service with an emphasis on preventative medicine would directly reduce women's domestic responsibilities in the area of childcare and care of the aged. Similarly, the provision of reticulated water and electricity has considerable potential for reducing women's domestic burden, particularly in rural areas and informal settlements.

Decisions about prioritising services should occur at two levels. At one level for example, we need to work out which services have the most impact on reducing domestic labour. At another level (and more importantly) it is crucial to secure women's *participation* in deciding what services are important to them. This has implications for organisation and for the way in which decisions are made and implemented, as we tried to underscore in the second section of our paper. It also has implications for processes and structures of decision-making in any future society. The Mozambican and Nicaraguan experiences suggest, for example, that women are more likely to be represented at highly localised levels of decision-making; particularly working class women who are more constrained by demands on their time and mobility and by their more limited skills in relation to those demanded by public political life. We have discussed similar constraints on women in South Africa above.

A further issue is the impact of policy on gender relations within the household. In order to transform women's position within society, it is important to increase women's bargaining power within the household. This appears to hinge on the visibility and recognition of women's labour, the control over the products of their labour and over household resources (it is here that legal reform becomes critical) and on their access to income relative to other members of the household (husbands and children). These complexities have been simplified in the emphasis on women's entrance into production and public life. In societies undergoing socialist transition, this is often seen to be overcome by women's participation in the collectivisation process. This does not, however, directly confront the problem of domestic labour and reproduction. In effect, it increases women's load by adding to their domestic burden by the imperative to participate in cooperative production.

While the increased burden on women due to the entry into production is recognised, the potential this has for also empowering women in gender struggles is avoided. The paradoxical effect of this is that it empowers *men* in their struggle to maintain unequal relations within the household

and, concomittantly, within society. This is most clearly illustrated in the following example from Mozambique, where the OMM urges women to:

> ...'speak with kind words' to their husbands so as not to raise the ire of men who already find OMM threatening. Rather, they are encouraged to demonstrate their ability to do what men can do, in addition to their household work, by getting up earlier and going to bed later (Urdang, 1985:367).

Shirley Conran of 'Superwoman' fame would have no problem with this!

This is a particular problem for women in rural areas where the emphasis on integrating women into production ignores the fact that they are already producers, even if their labour is invisible. In a number of socialist countries rural production takes the form of family farms or communal farms where the unit of production is still the household, for example China. Here, women's labour remains invisible despite their integration into production. Moreover, since remuneration is still based on the labour of household units rather than that of individual producers within the household, women's bargaining power within the household is not improved (Croll, 1983). For example more investment will continue to be made in male children than female children because of their greater earning capacity.

One example of how gender relations within the household have been tackled within the context of collectivisation is that of the green-zone cooperatives around Maputo in Mozambique. Here women work in collective production, take part in the decision-making process and control the products of their labour. While participation in production does increase their workload, this burden is partially offset by their greater economic independence. Because they also control the products of their labour, women are empowered. This enables them to confront gender relations within the household from a more confident and economically independent base. This does not occur without struggle, as Arnfred points out:

> ... talks with the cooperative ... confirm that this rarely happens without fights and conflicts with the husband ... . Gender relations have changed, but the battle has not yet been entirely won. In many cases, according to the women, the husbands only have accepted the cooperative membership of the wives as they have seen material gains from it ... and even then peace at home is only upheld by the women accepting a double workload (Arnfred, 1986:21).

It is at this point that legal reforms become important in providing the support for women in their struggles. On its own, however, it cannot change relations either in the household or in society generally. The irony is that legal reform on its own mainly benefits women who are already advantaged either economically or through education and political power.

In South Africa the fact that urbanisation and industrialisation are more advanced than elsewhere, requires a careful consideration of these issues in an urban context. This is a particular challenge for people advocating policy favouring redistribution in the process of transition. Some pointers for future research and policy can be drawn from our study. As in the rural areas, the effect of policy has to be seen through the prism of household relations. With reference to wage labour for example, the Congress of South African Trade Union's (COSATU) call for a *living wage* is more appropriate than calls that have been made at other times and in other places for a *family wage* since it entails a recognition that women are also breadwinners. Furthermore, current struggles against the state's policies of privatisation are certainly progressive for women. While the individual wage confers on the household the responsibility to provide their own social services, it not only burdens women in terms of extending household labour, but it also weakens women's position in the household since their income-earning capacity is often lower than male members given the sexual division of labour. In female-headed households as well, whilst women might not have to battle over the distribution of income and resources within the household, they are still in the worst-paid jobs and are the first to be retrenched as a result of their subordinate position in the labour force. Attempts to alter the sexual division of labour in the South African context, therefore, are critical policy imperatives.

Another area in which current state policy may be retrogressive for women is in its emphasis on small business and the informal sector as sources of employment. The informal sector in South Africa is dominated by women and therefore policies to promote it would appear to benefit women. However, often these activities take place within the household and as is the case with the family farm, women may suffer: their labour increases yet remains invisible and therefore unrecognised, and whilst their income-earning capacity is enhanced, they do not necessarily control this income. We are not suggesting that the informal sector should be abolished, as it does provide a source of employment for women and may provide them with a measure of independence and a means of survival. However, development policy that is founded on burgeoning 'small family businesses' tends to lock women into subordinate positions within the household and within the economy at large. We are suggesting, then, that policy should move away

from viewing the household as the unit of production and reproduction. rather, individuals should be seen as producers and society should take responsibility for reproduction. While the latter may not be possible in the short term, a redistributive policy, properly constructed, can go some way to providing the conditions within which it can occur.

For these issues to be addressed seriously, the validity of gender struggle has to be acknowledged and the development of political will among women has to be allowed to flourish, particularly on their own terrain. This is essential given that decisions will have to be made concerning the extent to which resources can be allocated away from production and towards a social wage. This struggle is ongoing. Here we can learn from the experiences of working class struggles in Britain where women benefitted from the material gains afforded by the welfare state. The resources and services upon which women have come to depend have been systematically eroded by the onslaught of Thatcherism. Equally in the transition to socialism, women can never become complacent, particularly in times of economic crisis or stringency or when choices have to be made over the allocation of resources. It is important to reiterate that gender struggle does not only involve women fighting to change their conditions and the conditions of their class, but also men's struggle to retain their power. The myth of gender-neutral policy, therefore, has to be challenged. This can only be done if women develop an awareness of both their powerlessness *and* their political power. Socialist feminism, as a political discourse and practice, provides the surest guarantee that this can be achieved.

NOTES

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1. In contrast to other conferences on the question of a post-apartheid future, Amsterdam noted that 'gender issues should be seen as an integral part of the process of transformation' (SAERT, 1986).
2. We are indebted to Michelle Friedman for the development of these ideas.
3. The A-Team is the vigilante group operating in Chesterville.

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