

WOMEN AND NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS

By Muriel Tillinghast* and Patricia McFadden**

Muriel Tillinghast:

Thank you for the invitation to Yale University — a most unlikely institution at which to talk about the civil rights movement. But things do change.

I was intrigued by the subject of women inside of the civil rights movement because that really does get to the core of interpersonal relations between activists, and get inside the sanctum sanctorum. As I thought about this discussion, I had to wrestle with myself about how honest I was going to be about the struggle of being a female in a liberation movement. But then I decided to lay out as much as my fifteen or twenty minutes would allow; then you can feel free to ask me what you like.

Prior to my joining the civil rights movement, I had been engaged in basically a Christian organization. I had been a member of the Lutheran Church. My first organizing effort was trying to get three hundred Luther Leaguers to a national conference. I was nine at the time. By the

time I had reached my college years, I had experience organizing Luther Leagues on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. (Those of you who know the political geography of the Eastern Shore will know that that experience gave me a good introduction to Mississippi some years later.) And as a Black female I had learned how to function and not bow down in situations that might not necessarily be at my command. And I learned how to face some very strident opposition very early in the game. So by the time that I had joined the civil rights movement, I was an old hand at how to get people moving and how to get ideas out.

My early years in the movement were with NAG (Non-Violent Action Group), which was basically the Washington, D.C. representative of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee). My recollection was that it was an egalitarian organization. In fact, when I think about the question of gender distinctions in the civil rights movement, and see how they affected my role and SNCC's politics, I must conclude that the gender distinction began when the movement itself began to break inside.

Those of us in the movement considered ourselves warriors. We knew that we were in a war. Basically my experience was of being treated as if I had good sense and as if I had something to offer that would be listened to.

SNCC was overwhelmingly male, as I remember. There weren't an awful lot of females, but those of us who were female Project Directors held our own. In the state of Mississippi there were three of us. We held down — and that was literal — any number of counties. When the SNCC staff came together to talk about increasing the effectiveness of either the freedom vote or the cotton allotment campaign, or running people for the school board, or dealing with desegregation issues, or running the freedom schools, I can't say truthfully that there was any difference in the reception of what I had to say and the reception of some of the males.

In the Movement there was a lot of give and take. And SNCC had a style of operation which I guess was

* Muriel Tillinghast is a human rights and community activist. She was a key organizer for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and one of three female organizers who headed county projects in Mississippi in 1964. She and her staff were responsible for Washington, Issaquena and Sharkey counties. She became the second state coordinator for the Council of Federated Organizations, the umbrella civil rights organization which called for the famous Mississippi Summer Project. Ms. Tillinghast resides in Brooklyn, New York, with her daughters, Bayo Callender and Aisha Hinton, her two dogs and two cats. She does social services advocacy in health and child welfare, labor issues and legal referral. She has recently joined the administration of Children in Crisis, which specializes in finding and counseling runaways and kidnap victims.

** Patricia McFadden is a member of the African National Congress who fled South Africa because of her political activities, and hopes to go home soon. She did her D.Phil at Oxford, and does work on gender in Southern African society and politics. She is presently doing research in Dakar, Senegal. At the time a version of this paper was given at the Yale Law School in April 1990, she was Visiting Professor at the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell University. She has three children, a son and a daughter still in South Africa, and a young son with her.

really based on being, well, frontline troops in the American experience. In SNCC we didn't vote on issues. You can't vote on an activity when those who will implement the decision are putting their lives on the line. So people had to come to a consensus in terms of what the next stage of activity was going to be. We moved by consensus. SNCC was known to have marathon meetings. We'd start a meeting one day and the issue would be wrestled with — seventy-two hours later we would still be talking. We would talk non-stop until we had come to some understanding about what we were going to do and how we were going to do it. I can't say that I was out of any of those heated discussions, and we used to have many a heated discussion.

Those of us in the movement considered ourselves warriors. We knew that we were in a war. Basically my experience was of being treated as if I had good sense and as if I had something to offer that would be listened to.

My primary role in SNCC was in two parts. One was in field operations. In the field, the survival instinct is primary and anybody who can survive is, in fact, a valued soldier and is useful in terms of training new people. When I came out of the field and began to work in our central operations, I think I began to recognize that there was some distinction between myself and some of the other people — those being male. But to the degree that I could raise philosophical and ideological objections to people taking primacy over me or other people, we could keep that in check.

SNCC had a central operation that was literally run by one female, who oversaw its many tentacles. Her name was Ruby Doris Robinson. She's no longer with us, but Ruby Doris was a voice that was heard and heeded. She ran the operation like a boss. Given our situation, one had to pay keen attention to orders. Sometimes the orders were told; they weren't totally understood, but you knew that Ruby Doris had said so, and you moved accordingly.

SNCC was a patchwork of democratic thought in action. However, there were times, particularly when an action was drawing or was deemed to draw a certain kind of attention, when those who had experience were clearly in charge. It is not unlike battlefield soldiers under fire; those who have survived previous exposures are the natural and undisputed leaders. We all had experiences, some more than others, at one time or another, looking down the barrel of a gun or facing mobs.

People whose names may be known to you — Bob Moses, Stokely Carmichael — ran other parts of the operation, but when we got together as a large scale organization, I cannot truly say that any of us paid much attention to gender. We really paid attention to what you had done, what kind of respect you commanded, how effective you

had been as an organizer; and, based on that, then you could run whatever you had to say.

I must admit that I have heard from other women, however, that they had some difficulty in making themselves appreciated in the organization. But, I must say that these women were not known for having strong organizing talents. And SNCC was the kind of organization that you bored your way in by the ante you brought. The ante you brought was your ability to skillfully organize communities. And Black, white, male or female, if you were weak in that area, you weren't paid much attention to.

I guess I never thought that the Movement was going to break up the way it did. For me, the Movement was, in fact, SNCC. Although there were other organizations that existed, and some that have come up since, none of them had the intellectual thrust, the level of commitment, the cutting edge, the ability to function with almost nothing and to bring about basically revolutionary change. We in SNCC tried to be guided by our principles — revolutionary principles. (I make no bones about it, SNCC was definitely left of center, and some of us were left of left.) We were looking and groping on a world-wide philosophical basis for instruments that would help us explain the new day that we thought we were going to be a part of bringing in. We knew that we were at the forefront of a historical process, and we tried to treat the moment with the kind of respect and the kind of intelligence that it required.

As the Movement moved to the point where domestic policy was not going to hold us, we decided to delve into international policy, to make some decisions about some land spaces and other places, about who had the right to live there, and under what form of government. By the winter of 1965, if my memory serves me well, SNCC was exploring the Palestinian issue on the basis of "One Man, One Vote," our battle cry. A SNCC paper was publicly issued. The effect was sweeping. Inside the Movement, the sense of collective support for this seemed solid. Outside the organization, financial support began to crumble almost overnight. SNCC and the Mississippi activists were the first to hold public demonstrations against the War in Vietnam.

Any number of far-flung places invited us to come and see what they were doing. I had the privilege of going to the Soviet Union and traveling to areas that are now "under turmoil." Other people went to Japan and learned of Japanese society — it's not all you see in the media. Other people had gone to Africa and met many of the revolutionary leaders in Africa — Nkrumah, Oginga Odinga — whom some of you, if you read your 60's history, know was a principal warrior in the decolonization of eastern Africa. And we all came back with new perspectives to give. Well, that was really too much for COINTELPRO¹ because the idea that we were no longer

1. The FBI's "Counter-Intelligence Program". See generally Kenneth O'Reilly, *RACIAL MATTERS* (1989); Ward Churchill and Jim VanderWall, *AGENTS OF REPRESSION: THE FBI'S SECRET WARS AGAINST THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY AND THE AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT* (1988); Nelson Blackstock, *COINTELPRO: THE FBI'S SECRET WAR ON POLITICAL FREE-*

going to be domestic, but seriously international in perspective, and hooking up with people on other lists in other countries, was enough to have them consider us a dangerous operation. I must confess, however, that I think their paranoia far outdistanced the reality.

Because of these policy decisions, we came under severe scrutiny by surveillance forces that function at the highest level of the federal government. We had gotten word of the destabilization because, thank goodness, there are friends everywhere (sometimes people you really do not know) who let you know that the oppressive forces are getting ready. I must admit, that was quite an experience. It was at that time that I took leave of the organization. The destabilization was so professional; one could not tell who were the friends and who were the foes. So I knew it was time to leave.

I noticed, during the period of destabilization, that a number of people began to vie for positions. I think that it was during this time that I began to recognize that some people were going to come out of this way ahead of the game and some people were going to come out barely making it. There were many people who had left the college community to organize, and some who had never entered it. All of them had given a great deal to the Movement. Most of the SNCC people remained nameless and without any kind of media exposure.

For me, the Movement was, in fact, SNCC. Although there were other organizations that have come up since, none of them had the intellectual thrust, the level of commitment, the cutting edge, the ability to function with almost nothing and to bring about basically revolutionary change.

Those people who did get media exposure were able to move on in terms of jobs that were more economically satisfying, and perhaps to positions of power. When the anti-poverty movement was on the drawing board, we had two of the architects come to a SNCC conference and offer to buy us up. They wanted to buy up the best organizers in the country, and there we were. We put them out of the meeting. We were literally insulted. But I have the feeling that some people went around the corner and said, "May I have your name and address, I'll call you later." Some of the big corporations were looking to enhance their corporate leadership and assuage their guilt, and some of our people went into the corporate structure. You haven't heard from them since, nor have I.

Most of us females went back to our homes and tried

to pick up the pieces where we were. For me, I returned to Howard University to graduate school and, finding that lacking, wandered to New York, where there's always a twenty four hour movement in need. I think that's where I began to see that there may have been some serious gender problems within the organization, because none of the females picked up any of the goodies. Now it might have been because we were the purists in the operation — but I don't think so. I don't think any of us were asked, so we had nothing to turn down.

There was one woman who interestingly enough did come away with some ante. Her name is Unita Blackwell. She has been the Mayor of Mayersville in Issaquena County, Mississippi, for a long time. She was sort of my "find." We all had local "finds." Unita's mine. She was a person who had seen us walking down the street and said, "you all come on in." And that's how we met. And, I must say, the experience was obviously profound; she's brought about a number of changes in her area. But she's the only woman I know who walked away with any semblance of political power.

I'm sure what I'm going to say next is going to open up a Pandora's box. Within SNCC there were two movements which began to make themselves felt by the mid-60's. The movements were simultaneous to the destabilization; maybe we destabilized ourselves. One of the two destabilizing movements was cultural nationalism; the other was women's rights. I was hostile to the development of both.

Regarding the cultural nationalism movement, I felt that in terms of ideological, revolutionary behavior, it served to divide. We had a number of people who came from other ethnic backgrounds, we had people who were southern and northern whites, Hawaiians, Japanese. We had all kinds of people and SNCC was a cauldron that used effectiveness in the field as its framework, which I thought was sufficient. I didn't think we needed any other qualifying criteria or determinants.

To my recollection, both movements — cultural nationalism and women's rights — came about as a direct result of people's dissatisfaction in their relationships with people inside of the movement. I'm talking about one-on-one relationships — personal relationships. And my position was: that's your business; just because you and your boyfriend couldn't get along, I don't see how you can parlay that into a broader issue that gets us all involved. But even more importantly, I thought that the issue of racism was so profound and fundamental in this country that if racism were ever abated, and resolved, that all other inequities by definition had to be changed. I also felt that Black people were probably the least desirable element to propagandize and with whom to be engaged. Once people would walk away from the Black issue, I thought, they would have a hard time returning, because the condition of the Black Community is so intertwined with historical inequities — economic, political and social — that it would be far easier to take on another issue and forget about the race question. As we now see, history, in fact, has shown me to be right. Thank you.

Patricia McFadden:

Thank you for inviting me here and sharing the eve-

DOM (1975); Dhoruba bin Wahad, *Speaking Truth to Power: Political Prisoners in the United States*, in this issue of YALE J. OF L. AND LIBERATION, at 35-41.

ning with us. I'm coming from basically similar traditions as the last speaker, Muriel Tillinghast, but I am a feminist. I think that gender issues have to have a very high profile on our agenda. Of course, there are different types of feminism, and they are historically conjunctural. I'm not talking about feminism as a homogenous, undifferentiated concept, locked in a Eurocentric definition, or even a restricted class definition. Rather, my definition of feminism is the lived experience over centuries that African women, wherever they are, have resisted all forms of oppression. Our insistence that we are a total part of our societies, and always have been, is the process of reclaiming our feminist past. We want that history to be known. I want to know who my foremothers were — I want to know all those beautiful African women who came before me. And if I don't have a concept of feminism in terms of what they did in creating a history of Black people in the world, then I cannot find them.

In trying to understand the struggle for liberation in Southern Africa, or what has happened in Zimbabwe, in Mozambique, and in Angola, in the subregions of Southern Africa, with which I am most familiar, I would like to look at how women have made history in the last thirty years (or even centuries further back; I'm just going to start with the period of nationalism.) In terms of reclaiming our most recent past as African women, it is very important to understand the ideological inputs that have gone into our political participation, or our marginalization from the political process. Nationalist ideology has been very central in defining what women strive for, how they strive for it, and what they actually get at the end of the day when the wars are over — whether one is talking about anti-colonial wars or considering the anti-apartheid struggle in the Southern African region, specifically within South Africa.

Basically, nationalist ideology is an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist ideology that mobilizes oppressed, dispossessed populations, and does not have any tolerance at all for gender issues. There is no space in nationalism for gender differences, although African women have been in the forefront of anti-colonial struggles ever since we were colonized. African women were in the forefront of the enslavement resistance five to six hundred years ago, yet we are invisible in the written history of that period. And nationalism simply compounds that invisibility by defining politics as most definitely a male sphere of activity.

The anti-colonial struggles of Southern Africa have provided a platform, a context for African women of all ages to come to the fore, to become more conspicuous, and to redefine the terms and the terrain of political activism in that region. Women's roles in African liberation movements are highly conjunctural. During the war against Portuguese colonialism, for example, women were armed and engaged in battle against the Portuguese. There was nothing negative about being a woman guerilla. Very few of them, of course, later made it into the ranks of the military; that remains a male seat of power. Women in ZANU (the Zimbabwe African National Union) and ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union), and now in the African National Congress of South Africa, wielded weapons. A very important consequence of their participa-

tion in this particular sphere of African anti-colonial resistance is that, when women bear arms, they explode many of the myths which frequently dictate how women should struggle. The liberation wars of South Africa have actually broken several such barriers, and have impacted women's struggles within South Africa very definitely and very directly.

But I think that nationalism as an ideology basically defines women as a base, as a political base through which a small core of men aspire to state power. Look at all the great African leaders of the last half-century. Where are the women? The women are the ones who cook the food, clean the halls, make sure that the glasses of water and jugs are on the table, and make sure that everything is properly prepared for our great leaders. I absolutely refuse to accept the status of being somebody's shadow or of being one of the so-called great women behind every great man. African women have the right to be part of the decision-making process. They have worked and struggled for the right to sit side by side with men.

When I look at South Africa, perhaps the most distressing case is that of Winnie Mandela. She is a fantastic woman, who has fought for twenty-seven years, and the Boers could not break her. They banned her, they isolated her, they harassed her physically and psychologically, but she always came through it, triumphant. The minute Nelson Mandela stepped out of prison, she reverted to being Mrs. Mandela. Of course she's not a shadow — after twenty-seven years nobody can just wish you away — but her marginalization does say something very important about the way the position of women is structured within a nationalist ideology. That is, women are seen as either holding the fort for men when they're not in the lime-light, or simply being mothers and wives and extensions of leaders.

I think that if we have a clear understanding of nationalist ideology vis-a-vis gender issues, then we will see how it was, for example, that African women played a very crucial role in the anti-colonial struggles of the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. It was African women who, during the two major imperialist wars, fed the African continent, and continue to support the millions of poor Africans on the continent, even as the crisis deepens. As the debt burden has increased, it is African women who have used the terrain of the household to resist neo-colonialism, though that arena of struggle has not been recognized as being at the forefront of the anti-colonial campaign. Of course, during the nationalist period before the 1960s, many African women were also very active in the more commonly acknowledged spheres of resistance. An example would be the trade union movement. There were great African women trade unionists all over the continent who through their activism gave the trade union movement a continuity that it would not have had in times of very serious crises, since it was usually the men who were the most conspicuous, and who were picked up and jailed or detained. We see this repeated over and over in South Africa.

But note that women's roles within national liberation movements from the 1940s and '50s tended to be gendered roles. They are roles which are directly related

to women's reproductive capacity as mothers, as wives, and also as community workers and activists who are based within their respective communities. The shifting terrains of the South African struggle are really a reflection of the way that African women can shape the resistance against colonialism at particular points in time, and have an impact which remains largely unrecognized.

Nationalism is not only a problem for women during the period of anti-colonial mobilization, when women are the ones who grow and cook the food, who keep the family together, and so on. It is also a problem in the post-colonial period. Several indications clearly show that women are experiencing problems in the so-called independent African countries, and many of those problems are going to replicate themselves in a post-apartheid South Africa. We can see the trends in Zimbabwe, in Mozambique, and now in Angola. We see how the state is beginning to roll back many of the gains and spaces which women made during the period of anti-colonial struggle.

This is reflected in the class character of the women who actually benefit in the post-colonial period, and of those who suffer. Most of the women who are put in prison, shot, and/or harassed by the police, are working women. And virtually all of the women who get (even a tiny) piece of the cake in the period after independence, are middle class, educated women — a small clique who might or might not have participated in the earlier nationalist struggles. They tend to come from rich families or from the families of nationalist leaders, and they have a space in the society by virtue of their social origins. They have access to women's organizations, and they take control over the directions of research and work, mainly through access to resources via international organizations. We see this division among women replicated in Zimbabwe and now, more and more, in Mozambique and in Angola. As the state establishes itself, as it defines its own particular interests and objectives more clearly, so also most women are pushed further and further away from the sites of political power and influence.

Nationalist movements always mobilize the working people on the basis of an anti-colonial rhetoric. They promise education, basic housing, improvement of transportation services, etc. But because the regimes that have come to independence in Africa do not control their economies, and do not have real control over the state institutions that they inherit, they are unable to implement real and definite programmes to change the lifestyles of the masses of people who actually fought against colonialism.

All over the African continent we see poor women mobilizing and reformulating their relationship with the post-colonial state, because it is basically an irresponsible state when it comes to women and children. It is interested in mobilizing people for a particular political interest that is mainly to the benefit of those who run the state, rather than exercising its civic duty to provide basic amenities to the working people. Ironically, the impoverishment of the African peoples has actually become the basis upon which petite-bourgeois regimes go around the world begging. The begging basket is held up in the name of thousands of babies who die every day, and these regimes vie for the status of being the poorest African country

known in the United Nations system so that they can get more aid. Yet, that aid is then spent on projects and interests that have very little relevance to the lives of poor Africans.

I'm saying all this because I do not think that liberation struggles guarantee the reconstruction of egalitarian societies. This is the lesson that we have learned in Africa. It began in Algeria and has spread across the continent. Black people in Southern Africa have engaged in struggle because they hoped that, having armed themselves with the weapons which the white colonizer forbade them to carry, they could begin the process of restructuring their societies. Any kind of weapon was a threat to the white colonial regime. And so, having armed themselves, formed organizations, mobilized hundreds of thousands of people, and engaged in long wars of resistance, which cost many young lives, they thought and hoped that this would be the vehicle through which egalitarian systems could be developed. But ten to fifteen years after the wars, we see that actually there is no guarantee, particularly for women, that liberation wars are the stepping stone, the transition mechanism, to egalitarian societies which are non-sexist and which are not gender-biased.

If we can revolutionize our role, our status, our position as mothers, to make an impact against the apartheid system, as an anti-apartheid weapon, fine. But what about afterwards? Ultimately, we have to move out of the household. We have to redefine our power, not as lying within the pot, but rather within the locus of the state.

This reality has sent shock waves through the women's movement in Southern Africa. In Mozambique and in Angola it came as a kind of hangover of the continuing war which the bandits² have waged with the open support of the United States. Women had begun to consolidate some of the gains that had been made during the anti-colonial war, but the bandits have totally undermined any base which the Angolan and Mozambiquan people had begun to build. Now the Mozambiquan government has been pushed to the point where the IMF (International Monetary Fund) has come in, and we are witnessing the same story as we have seen in Kenya, in Ghana, all over the continent: the restricting re-colonization of African economies and societies. In conditions of austerity, women are being pushed back into the home, defined as mothers, as wives, no longer as political activists, no longer vying for political power, no longer having access to the minimal resources which they could use to change their lives

2. RENAMO and UNITA, respectively.

and the lives of their children, of future generations. Imperialist domination of Africa has consequences for everybody, but women and children are the major disadvantaged groups on the continent.

The struggle in South Africa is the highest level of struggle that has been seen on the African continent, and the most consistent. It has also been the most protracted struggle against colonialism in known history, side by side with the struggle of the Irish against British occupation. The African National Congress is the oldest liberation movement in Africa. Yet it is still fighting the war against settler colonialism, the last but also the most resistant and the most resilient bastion of colonialism in Africa, mainly because it is supported by the United States, Britain, and all the so-called major developed countries. I think that you would agree with me that freedom is knocking on the door. As one comrade said, we have to start buying extra suitcases because soon we will be going home. And it is exciting, it is exhilarating, it is good. We fought hard, and now we have almost reached our goal. The white racists have their backs against the wall, and if it were not for the United States and Britain, we would have gotten them out of there already, a long time ago. We would not have lost so many young, beautiful people who could make South Africa a more beautiful country in the future.

At this juncture, however, with the pattern of other post-colonial states in front of us, it is crucial to examine gender issues in the ANC, and the nationalist movement that will soon ascend to power. The African National Congress has a women's section within which women's issues are raised. But women's issues — posed as the "women's question," which is a typical nationalist conception of gender issues — are still largely defined as the concern of women. That is not an empowering concept. It does not recognize that women have the right to leadership at the same level as men. And I think that within the African National Congress, to a very large extent, women still play very traditional roles even as they participate in the anti-colonial, anti-apartheid struggle.

Basically, the ANC adopts one of the two main positions taken on the gender issue in South Africa. The organization's view is that feminism — and raising issues of feminism, of the empowerment of women, and of women competing at the center of power — is divisive. The argument is that our major enemy is the Boers, it is racism, it is apartheid, it is institutionalized inequalities. About the gender issue, well, when we get home everything will be fine, we will be free, and with our country back in our hands, we can have our own traditions and culture.

But what do those traditions mean for South African women? That traditional customary law in South Africa defines women as minors; that they have no rights vis-à-vis the patriarchy; that the men can beat them up, and then turn around and say, "a woman is like a child, you have to chastise her, you have to put her on the straight and narrow"? The implications of legal systems, of cultural behavior, of cultural systems which define women in very negative and restrictive terms, must be carefully and critically appraised. Yes, women can make great strides during periods of war, women can be outstanding as indi-

viduals, and some women can actually break through the power barriers and sit on the central decision-making bodies of nationalist organizations. But it is very important for us to understand that this does not guarantee that the millions and millions of women within these societies will have the right to fulfill themselves as total human beings — as women, and as citizens, not just as somebody's wife or girlfriend or mistress, nor as a lower-paid, over-worked or unemployed woman in the home.

Within South Africa, we see that women are beginning to redefine the politics of the nationalist movement, irrespective of what the nationalist position is. This involves the development of a middle road between the one extreme position set out above, which is very clearly articulated in the ANC, and the other extreme stance, which is against the participation of men in women's organizations. I have no quarrel with women who insist on women-only organizations, but I think that that form of organization must be viewed conjuncturally and tactically. During the phase of anti-colonial resistance, it is not possible to mobilize women separately from men, and in South Africa, it is not possible to effectively resist colonialism and be separate. This is the major problem faced by women in the liberation movements. I am in the liberation movement, but my feminism is considered problematic by mainstream nationalists — female and male.

How can you be a feminist and be in the national liberation movement? I do not see a contradiction between the two. Along with many women in South Africa, I see a position located between the backward argument that feminism and gender analysis is divisive, on the one hand, and the separatist problematic on the other. The tactical solution is to make a space within the national liberation movement. We have been a part of the national liberation movement for as long as it has existed, and we want that feminism to be articulated inside it.

So, for example, women in the South African trade union movement are saying, "no way, we want these trade unions to represent us as women and as workers, not just as workers. You're a man, and I'm a woman. How can you tell me that we are not different? First of all, the Boers pay men more than they pay women in most waged work. Secondly, in any reduction of the workforce, women are the first to go." Historically, women have tended to occupy the most vulnerable and least paying jobs, the jobs with lowest skills and status, in all our societies. It doesn't mean that women cannot fly Boeings or that we cannot fly to the moon. It just means that it is convenient for the system to keep us *en masse* in particular disadvantaged positions, and in that way it is able to stifle the popular resistance which stems from women's specific experiences of oppression as women. So, with this analysis, women are changing the trade union movement, and they are controlling the community organizations in the townships of South Africa.

This is very interesting, but also very problematic. The resistance to rent increases, the mobilization around rejecting the general sales tax, and around issues like homelessness in the townships, the inadequacy of housing — all these are spheres of political activism where women are in the forefront, which women control. And they

are making an impact. But the problem is that they are still reproductively-defined roles, defined (for example) in terms of our being mothers, so we are concerned about where our children are going to sleep. We are concerned about stretching the few rand we have, which we slave for daily, to feed our children.

Now, if we can revolutionize our role, our status, our position as mothers, to make an impact against the apartheid system, as an anti-apartheid weapon, fine. But what about afterwards? If we are limited only to the spheres of activism that involve us in terms of our reproductive capacities, then after the war women are pushed back into the home. And they cannot resist, because they have not empowered themselves beyond the home, beyond the household. These tactics of resistance are very important, but they are *only* tactics. They should not become the strategy, they should not become the objective of our engagement in the struggle. We should see that they reflect women's particular location at particular points in time, and we must keep in focus the particularity of such struggles, and use them conjuncturally.

Ultimately, we have to move out of the household. We have to redefine our power, as lying not within the pot, but rather within the locus of the state. We must aspire to control the state, as a mechanism, as a system through which we can change our lives. These are the major challenges that confront activists in Southern Africa, and elsewhere in the world.

There are many feminists in Southern Africa, by the way. It is just that most of them won't say that they are feminist, because if they do, the men run. And you know, it gets lonely sometimes. So maybe we need to work on this thing. Feminism is not a no-no. It is really, simply, a statement and expression of the lives of some of the most beautiful women in the world. And African women have been and are some of the greatest feminists in history.

The major issue now facing us as activists in Southern Africa, is that we have to reclaim our foremothers' herstory, and we have to understand why it has been invisible. Why is it that when Africans reclaim their history, it is basically only a male history? We have to insert our foremothers' story into our heritage. And we have to take that experience of struggle into the future. It will correlate very well with the objective of present-day women on the continent, that our lives not be hidden, or made invisible. Women in Southern Africa have had a very forceful presence, one that makes all the difference in our resistance to apartheid. Its development from this point on will be crucial for the future reconstruction of South Africa and the continent along non-sexist, democratic lines.

