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"No Freedom without the Women": Mobilization and Gender in South Africa, 1970–1992

Gay W. Seidman

SINCE AT LEAST the turn of the century, nationalist movements have regularly promised to improve the status of women: before taking power, they have pledged to end gender-based subordination. Just as regularly, however, most of these promises have gone unfulfilled. In general, although feminist activists have occasionally won some changes in women's legal status, basic household structures have remained intact, including men's control over women and property and elders' control over children.

Why is this pattern so frequent? Although each case differs, explanations generally revolve around a fear on the part of (mainly male) leaders that the attempt to change women's options could divide the "imagined community" on which nationalist ideologies are built, creating conflicts among their supporters. Some authors suggest that in anticolonial, or anti-Western, struggles, nationalist leaders have avoided explicit challenges to gender subordination because they viewed the domestic arena as the source of an autonomous national identity that must be protected (Chatterjee 1989; Tohidi 1991). In other cases, external threats may persuade nationalist leaders to emphasize preserving national unity instead of gender equality. In Mozambique, for example, the postindependence government backed away from gender subordination in order to strengthen its popular base: "Women's concerns have been taken off the

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immediate agenda, and replaced by the concerns of the nation as a whole" (Urdang 1989, 218).¹

Nationalist leaders, as sociologist Judith Stacey points out, have regularly faced a conundrum: even when they sincerely hope to challenge the subordination of women, their effort to maintain a popular base requires them to respond to supporters' demands, articulated primarily by men who generally have little immediate interest in challenging gender subordination. These demands frequently involve the reconstruction of beleaguered peasant households, even when that means reconstructing gender inequality (Stacey 1983, esp. 248–67). Women have often been active in nationalist movements but have rarely achieved visible leadership roles, and, rather than challenge gender subordination, they have frequently stressed pragmatic efforts to give women access to the resources required for fulfilling traditionally defined domestic roles (Molyneux 1986). In Nicaragua and Zimbabwe as well as in China, reinforcing existing household relations has meant women have generally remained in, or even returned to, a subordinate position.

South Africa, however, may prove different. As it moves from a situation of white-minority rule to some kind of democracy in which the black majority is fully represented, a postapartheid government is likely to face demands articulated by an urban popular movement, not a movement based in the peasantry. In this article, I suggest that industrialization and urbanization have affected black men and women differently; new patterns of daily life have altered the context in which popular goals are elaborated.² Changes in the organization of work and family, coupled with changing forms of political organization, mean that a postapartheid state is likely to face gender-specific demands, articulated by women who may not explicitly accept feminist labels but who may refuse to subsume questions of gender subordination under appeals to national unity.

Although African women have remained concentrated in less skilled, low-paid work, they have been integrated into an industrial labor force

and have an unusual degree of economic independence. South Africa's migrant labor system has eroded the peasant economy almost beyond recognition; the conditions of social reproduction—the circumstances in which workers and their families live from day to day—have undermined the male-dominant household patterns that other nationalist movements have reinforced. During the 1980s, in the context of broad political mobilization, changes in women's labor force participation rates and in household patterns have led black working women to question assumptions of domestic subordination. Especially in the labor movement and within community groups, there is clear evidence that many black women believe a postapartheid state should respond to gender-specific concerns. Women activists, often organized in semiautonomous women's groups and supported by the international spread of feminist ideas and assistance, have increasingly raised what Maxine Molyneux (1986) calls "strategic" gender issues, questioning gender inequality within political organizations, within workplaces, and even within the domestic arena (Molyneux 1986).

This shift from "pragmatic" to "strategic" gender concerns is not unique to South African women's groups. Recent studies describe the way structural changes in Latin American households and work, in the context of women's political mobilization, have prompted new attention to gender inequalities (Alvarez 1990; Jelin 1990; Chinchilla 1991). Similarly, in the United States, changes in work and social reproduction—especially when women could draw on organizational resources of their own—play a crucial role in explaining why women activists began to frame gendered demands on the state in terms of women's autonomy, rather than in terms of a family wage (Brenner and Laslett 1991).

The South African case is unusual, however, for the extent to which feminist demands are beginning to reshape the agenda of a broad nationalist movement. During the past decade, as South African women have increasingly engaged in political activity, they have inserted gender issues into debates around the transition to majority rule. Gender-specific demands articulated by women who are already economically independent and who draw on their own organizational resources may not be ignored as easily as the histories of other nationalist movements would imply. Discussions of the popular movement in South Africa that ignore the degree of black women's participation in both the labor movement and the nationalist struggle generally overlook the extent to which class and nationalist consciousness have been shaped by a markedly gendered movement, in which women activists articulate gender-specific demands and reject gender subordination. In South Africa, we have the opportunity to observe in a contemporary setting a process that feminist historians claim has been overlooked in historical discussions of the making of

¹ Urdang 1989 points out that the Mozambican liberation movement (FRELIMO), which claimed to be both nationalist and socialist, was somewhat contradictory in its attitude toward a national consensus: "While class struggle is called for as a constructive force, women's struggle is seen as divisive." Kruks and Wisner 1989 offer a slightly different explanation, suggesting that, in addition to the external threat, FRELIMO tended to "dwell on women's ideological backwardness and passivity, [and] to identify women's problems primarily as those of traditional family relations." A "male-dominated (and urban-biased) FRELIMO" in the 1980s generally limited its discussion of gender issues to "exhortations to involve women in socialized production"—exhortations that ignored the extent to which women were already involved in peasant production.

² In lieu of a better alternative, I have followed a practice common among South Africans opposed in principle to apartheid's racial classification, using the term "African" when discussing people classified "African" and "black" when referring to people classified "African," "Colored," or "Indian."

European and North American working classes: a gendered construction of what it means to be a worker and citizen, and a gendered understanding of what working-class and political organizations should demand (Scott 1988, esp. 53–67).

Beginning with an analysis of the antiapartheid movement's historical approach to gender issues, I will describe how two decades of structural change have altered basic household patterns for many South Africans; how the emergence of semiautonomous women's groups has provided a forum in which women activists could raise gender-specific concerns within the popular antiapartheid movement; and how debates within the newly legal African National Congress (ANC), within the South African labor movement, and within women's groups indicate growing support for gendered demands. Drawing on activists' articles in South African community publications and on a participant-observation study involving attendance at meetings and unstructured discussions with a range of male and female activists, mainly in 1990–91, I will explore the reasons why gendered demands appear to have become so visible.³

Gendered migrant streams

South Africa's migrant labor system has long been considered fundamental to the apartheid system: for most of this century, most black South Africans have been legally allowed into white-designated areas only when employed in white-owned enterprises. The effects of this system can be seen in virtually all social relationships among people classified "African." Sociologists increasingly recognize that families can respond very differently to gendered migrant streams, depending on who goes, what reinvestment and income-earning opportunities exist, and how families respond to long separations (Russell 1986; Pedraza 1991). But in South Africa and the surrounding region, nearly all migrants have historically been male. Most discussions stress the way a gendered migrant labor system has left African women behind, socially as well as geographically: women have been expected to remain working in subsistence agriculture, waiting for male migrants to send their wages home (Murray 1981).

Since the early twentieth century, some African women have considered urban employment an attractive alternative to a subordinate position in homestead production, but state policies intervened to keep women and other Africans not employed by whites from moving to town,

³ Unless I had explicit permission to quote interviewees by name, I have preferred to identify them only by position or occupation.

often backed by rural African authorities who sought to preserve existing household relationships (Walker 1990, 196). Both the South African authorities and neoclassical economists have often suggested that rural households receiving migrants' remittances could do better economically than those without wage workers, because migrants' wages could provide investment capital (Lucas 1987). But in South Africa's bantustans—the areas set aside for the country's African majority, where 57 percent of South Africa's African women legally resided in the early 1980s (Simkins 1984, 6)—legal restrictions and overcrowding undermined peasant agriculture. Since the 1930s, few rural African households have been able to expand land or cattle-holdings (Beinart 1987; Bonner 1990). Remittances might help families survive, but migrants' wages could only rarely increase productive capacity (Keenan and Sarakinsky 1987). With few exceptions, women remaining in rural areas have experienced grinding poverty, increased agricultural labor, and persistent dependence on migrant remittances. By 1970, many rural African families relied on remittances for over half their monthly income; on its own, peasant agriculture rarely offered any hope of adequate family maintenance (Murray 1987).

In the context of declining family production, rural South African women's paid labor has often been essential for family survival. In the words of one African farm worker, "If the women and children don't work, we don't eat" (Comaroff 1985, 161; Marcus 1989, 100). Only a handful of African women could gain access to the education required for jobs in nursing, teaching, or social work, and few industrial jobs were open to women before the mid-1970s. In 1970, 3 percent of employed African women were professional workers, and 4 percent were industrial workers; 81 percent worked in agriculture or in service (Lawson 1986, 17–19). A strictly sex- and race-segregated labor market meant that most African women seeking work were limited to low-paid domestic or farm labor, to low-earning informal-sector activities such as food preparation, or to the better-paid but illegal and dangerous activities of beer brewing and prostitution.

Given the migrant labor system, the erosion of peasant agriculture, and the nature of jobs historically available to African women in South Africa, it is hardly surprising that discussions of apartheid's impact on black women have tended to emphasize the destabilization of African households rather than gender-based inequality within those households. Discussions of the problems confronting African women have tended to focus on how the collapse of rural households has left women impoverished and isolated, lacking either support from men or income-earning opportunities for themselves. Through most of this century, researchers pointed to marital breakdown, female-headed households, and high ille-

gitimacy rates—sometimes estimated at 60 percent of births in urban areas—as demonstrating the threat to family life posed by enforced separation and low male wages (Horrell 1968; Duncan 1983, 38).⁴

In this context, it is hardly surprising that South African social reformers have historically stressed the need for family reconstruction; the household has been treated as an unproblematic unit. While gender ideologies in southern Africa are somewhat confusing, mixing together Western ideals of female domesticity with the assumption that women should contribute to family survival (Cock 1990; Meintjies 1990), political leaders have rarely questioned family patterns that treat women as providers of child care and housework and that assume men retain authority within the family despite long absences.

Antipartheid women's organizations have tended to take the same approach, using "women" interchangeably with "wives" and "mothers" for most of this century (Walker 1982, 264). South Africa's employment, property, and tax laws have systematically discriminated against women, abortion remains illegal, and violence against women is endemic, yet few nationalist organizations have questioned domestic patterns. Until the late 1980s, nationalist organizations placed national liberation ahead of challenges to gender ideologies, an approach that had the added political advantage of avoiding a direct challenge to male household heads. From its founding in 1954, the ANC-affiliated Federation of South African Women (FSAW) called on the national liberation movement to address issues of special concern to women, but most of these concerns appeared directly linked to women's domestic roles. The organization as a whole "never doubted that its first responsibility was to the general liberation struggle, by blacks, against the white supremacist state" (Walker 1982, 263).⁵ That tradition persisted when antiapartheid groups were outlawed in 1960. In 1979, speaking for the ANC women's secretariat, Mavis Nhlapo said, "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" (Kim-

⁴ Figures on the increase in the formation of families outside marriage are complicated by the somewhat confused definition of "ever-married"; some unmarried couples behave as if they were married, even if no marriage has been legally recorded because bridewealth has not been paid to the woman's family.

⁵ In 1954, some 137 delegates to FSAW's first meeting approved a "Women's Charter" listing demands that "staked a claim to full equality between the sexes and began the search for answers to the questions about how best that could be achieved." This charter, however, was drawn up by a rather small group of leaders and received relatively little discussion within the liberation movement as a whole. Walker concludes, "Many of the women involved in the Federation of South African Women and the ANC Women League [before the ANC's banning in 1960] accepted that women were, in some way, subordinate to men, their responsibilities primarily domestic, and their political contribution supportive rather than innovative" (Walker 1982, esp. 156, 182, 264).

ble and Unterhalter 1982, 13). In 1985, an ANC spokeswoman told the Nairobi Women's Conference, "It would be suicide for us to adopt feminist ideas. Our enemy is the system and we cannot exhaust our energies on women's issues" (*Work in Progress* 1985, 31). In 1986, ANC activist Frene Ginwala slightly revised the theme but echoed its basic thrust: "Women's liberation in South Africa cannot be achieved outside of the context of the liberation struggle" (Ginwala 1986, 13). Until 1987, the exiled ANC Women's Section avoided discussing feminism, only setting up a commission on "women's emancipation" in 1987—a commission that apparently never met (Daniels 1991, 36).⁶

By the mid-1980s, the nationalist organization's leaders began to recognize, at least rhetorically, that working-class black women confronted gender-specific problems. But even when the ANC called for equal wages, for day-care facilities, or for job opportunities for women, discussions of what is still regularly called "the woman question" rarely addressed male dominance in the household. In 1989, a woman writing in the South African Communist party's journal insisted, "Our immediate task is the liberation of the black people," not raising gender-specific demands ("Clara" 1989, 39). Viewing attempts to politicize gender or family relationships as arising from "bourgeois" or "Western" feminism, spokespeople for any of the major organizations struggling against white-minority rule tended to suggest that "the woman question" was best left unasked (but see Kgotsisile 1990).

Increased labor force participation

Had this story ended in the 1970s, South Africa would almost certainly have followed the path of other newly independent African states: even if a democratically elected government had instituted land reform or minimum wage laws, persistent gender-based discrimination in employment, in property laws, and in politics probably would have reinforced gender ideologies in which men remained dominant in households. Certainly the ANC leadership, which will almost certainly form the first elected government, had expressed little interest in changing those patterns, and the antiapartheid movement seemed destined to repeat the pattern followed elsewhere.

A postapartheid government in the 1990s, however, may face demands that challenge traditional household structures. Paradoxically, over the past twenty years, state policies designed to promote industrialization and to slow African urbanization have also created new urban informal

⁶ At that 1987 meeting, the ANC Women's Section also suggested for the first time that the ANC should discipline members who battered their wives.

settlements while increasing African women's labor force participation outside agriculture. In the 1980s, segregated African townships became the center of widespread community activism: as women were mobilized into unions and community groups, and especially as independent women's groups were created, working women and community activists increasingly articulated demands outside the framework of the male-dominant household. Structural changes altered the conditions of social reproduction in ways that increased the possibility that some women might pursue gender-specific demands more vigorously and strengthened their capacity to do so.

Probably the most important structural shift affecting African families since the 1970s has been the increased labor force participation of women, in both urban and rural settings. Rapid industrial expansion through the 1960s increased employers' demand for African labor: by the early 1970s, government officials had effectively acquiesced in the shift to a black industrial labor force, allowing employers to hire Africans in skilled positions previously restricted to whites. In the 1960s, the government had tightened legal controls on unemployed Africans' movements, hoping to slow urbanization; but in the 1970s, as African workers were incorporated into the long-term industrial work force, their families often joined them in urban areas, legally or not (Greenberg 1987). By 1986, when the pass laws blocking unemployed Africans from moving into white-designated areas were officially removed, at least half of South Africa's African population lived in urban or peri-urban areas (Hindson 1987; Mabin 1989, 2).

Obviously, urbanization does not by itself eliminate gender hierarchies. In South Africa, moving to town can reinforce gender subordination; women illegally in cities may become completely dependent on, and vulnerable to demands of, men who hold legal residence rights (Ramphale 1989). But in the 1970s, families moving illegally to urban areas often joined informal settlements near major industrial centers; few could find space to rent in government-owned housing. Workers and their families lived in the interstices of apartheid's urban plans, without legal residence permits, without infrastructure or services, and under constant threat of pass raids and forced removals. Especially in informal settlements, women and men had equally precarious legal rights and equally inadequate resources.

Urbanization in the 1970s increased pressures on African women to find paid work, given that subsistence agriculture was impossible: here, the struggle was for land on which to build shacks, not to farm. Most black women had to find paid work. In the retail and clothing trades, 43 percent of married women reported receiving no economic support from their husbands, who were unemployed, lived elsewhere, and sent no

money or simply did not contribute to family upkeep; even those receiving support from their husbands said they could not raise their families on a single worker's wage (Barrett et al. 1985, 138). Although relatively few household-level studies of urban South Africa exist—an understandable lacuna, given the dangers facing would-be researchers in townships in the 1980s—the evidence that women remain largely responsible for household maintenance is incontrovertible. Many women live alone with children and receive little support from their children's fathers, but even women in stable relationships are likely to take financial responsibility for important aspects of household maintenance. Out of twenty-two households, for example, Caroline White found that only two of six female household heads received any financial assistance. In households that included two working adults, arrangements varied, but all the women White interviewed clearly considered their financial contributions as well as their domestic work essential to family reproduction (White 1991).

By 1980, over a third of African women in South Africa were formally registered in the work force, certainly an understatement of actual labor force participation (Pillay 1985, 22). Generally, work available to African women was low paid and low skilled: in a labor market segregated by both race and sex, African women had few options. Many black South African women were employed as domestic workers or earned cash through unregistered activities, usually hawking. But through the 1970s, somewhat better-paid, more stable jobs became available, especially to women with some education. As employers sought to cut labor costs, African women could find jobs in the commercial sector, usually as retail clerks or in low-skilled manufacturing jobs. By 1980, women made up 24.5 percent of the labor force in manufacturing and 38.6 percent of the labor force in commerce (Pillay 1985, 25). For employers, African women seemed to represent a labor pool that could be paid less than, and that was believed to be more docile than, men; for many women, even low-paid industrial or commercial work was more secure and better paid than domestic or informal sector work. Even in heavy industries, some activities—usually relatively unskilled, often involving assembly, machine-operating, sewing, and cleaning—were increasingly defined as women's work: in 1989, about 10 percent, or 34,000, of 330,000 metalworkers were women, most of them African (National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa [NUMSA] 1989, 14).

Patterns of African women's employment also changed in rural areas during the 1980s. Two aspects of government policy in the 1970s increased the chances for women living in bantustans to find paid work near or inside bantustan borders. First, government-aided mechanization of white agriculture reduced the numbers of farm laborers overall but

coincided with an increase in women working on farms, generally as seasonal workers at the harvest period.⁷ Women's share of the total labor force in commercial agriculture doubled, reaching 24 percent. In 1980, about 17 percent of employed African women worked on commercial farms (Barrett et al. 1985, 20; Marcus 1989, esp. 100–112).

State policies also created new possibilities for industrial employment for African women living outside urban centers. Through the 1970s and especially after 1982, the government began providing new incentives to industries willing to relocate, as part of the effort to slow black urbanization. By the mid-1980s, about 20 percent of South Africa's industrial production was located in nonmetropolitan areas (Wellings and Black 1987, 190). Heavier, more capital-intensive industries, such as metalworking, were unlikely to abandon the infrastructure, access to markets, and skilled labor forces of primary urban centers. But although labor-intensive industries such as textiles complained of the inconvenience, they tended to be attracted by low labor costs: workers in bantustan industrial sites received less than half the wages paid in white-designated urban centers, and labor costs were further cut by government incentive schemes paying as much as 95 percent of the total wage bill (Glaser 1987, 1; Keenan and Sarakinsky 1987, 595; Wellings and Black 1987, 191).

As they moved to semirural areas, employers also developed new attitudes toward employing African women in industrial jobs. The textile industry, which had previously employed mainly non-African women or African men, generally considered African women to be the best potential labor pool in the new industrial sites. Although initially cautious about the shift—in at least one case, hiring psychologists to study the motivation and aptitude of prospective African women workers—a 1970 report by textile industry researchers announced “the suitability of African women for industrial labor” (Mager 1989, 51). By the mid-1980s, African women over twenty were as likely as men to have completed elementary school, while more widespread use of birth control reduced the threat of what one factory supervisor called “the pregnancy factor” (Machache 1989, 91; Mager 1989, 51).⁸ Employers also recognized that

⁷ This pattern is not unique to South Africa. Agricultural mechanization reduces total labor requirements but tends to increase seasonal labor demands. In South Africa, even more than elsewhere, poor rural women provide a flexible labor pool, working in family subsistence plots most of the year but remaining available to commercial farmers as wage laborers during peak periods, such as harvesting.

⁸ This is a highly controversial issue; a history of racist efforts to reduce African birth rates has made it difficult to find reliable data regarding actual rates of voluntary contraceptive use. Nevertheless, contraceptive use has almost certainly increased over the last decades. In 1982, the Human Sciences Research Council found 57 percent of African women, 78 percent of women classified Indian, and 72 percent of women classified

African women would send their children to be raised by relatives rather than lose their jobs, so that family responsibilities seemed less likely to keep women from working steadily. By 1989, 27 percent of employed black women worked in clothing or leather manufacturing, making up more than two-thirds of the industry's labor force (NUMSA 1989, 14).

Changing labor force participation rates alone clearly do not alter attitudes toward gender ideologies; jobs available to most black South African women remain low paid, backbreaking, insecure, and unrewarding. Until 1981, South African law permitted employers to pay women 20 percent less than men in the same job category; men and women now have equal minimum wages, but pay scales vary, and black women generally remain segregated in low paid occupational categories (Lawson 1986, 57). In industries that employed black semiskilled and skilled workers, black women tended to remain concentrated in less-skilled sections of the factory (NUMSA 1989, 16).

Not surprisingly, many working women say they would prefer to stay at home: long hours and low pay combine with household chores to create a double shift in South Africa as elsewhere, and women often echo a single mother who insisted that the best change a new government could bring women was “to make sure men are paid enough to support their families.”⁹ Given women's domestic responsibilities and limited options in a labor market shaped by class, race, and gender, many, perhaps most, women may aspire to an idealized nuclear family, in which family members live together, and the husband's wage supports them all.

Nevertheless, a surprising number of working African women comment on the benefits they perceive in working—even when that labor is as backbreaking, low paid, and insecure as seasonal farm work. For women left alone with child-rearing responsibilities, wage labor means both income and greater control over their lives. Given the extraordinary fluidity and insecurity of household structures affected by gendered migration, many women say they prefer working to waiting (Barrett et al. 1985, 138). The links between work and autonomy are often explicit. A domestic worker with six children said she prefers to stay unmarried because “I can be my own boss.”¹⁰ A single farm worker feared anything preventing her from working would erode her independence: “I don't have a husband, many women's husbands are migrants, and we must

Coloured between the ages of fifteen and forty-nine were using birth control (South African Institute of Race Relations 1986, 3).

⁹ Interview conducted by the author with a diamond polisher, Johannesburg, July 11, 1991.

¹⁰ Interview conducted by the author with a domestic worker, Johannesburg, July 13, 1991.

have the ability to speak for ourselves" (Ritchken 1989, 443). Women who have already experienced marriage as an arena of subordination may view staying single as a preferable alternative, even if they have children to raise—as long as they can work (Mullins 1983, 39).¹¹

Gender-specific demands

That some women find wage labor grants them greater autonomy both outside and inside the household hardly implies a broad challenge to male domination: similar attitudes were voiced by many nineteenth-century American factory women, and yet the family wage, with attendant dependence on male wage earners, became a standard goal in labor campaigns (May 1985). In a context of political mobilization, however, increased labor force participation and new resources available to semi-autonomous women's groups have changed the way many activists discuss their aspirations. Women involved in the labor movement and in community groups have begun to articulate their political demands as independent citizens with specific needs: instead of asking a postapartheid state to respond to their needs as wives and mothers, they increasingly call for policies that will support women's autonomy while also responding to gender-specific needs.

Since the late 1970s, waves of urban popular mobilization—strikes, demonstrations, boycotts, and worker stay-aways—have placed intermittent pressure on employers and the South African state. Beginning in 1973 when African workers began to organize semilegal unions, the labor movement became a key component of resistance against the state. While some women workers have been active in unions since the 1950s, in the mid-1970s most analysts assumed that black South African women would be more compliant than semiskilled men. By the mid-1970s, however, labor conflicts often involved women workers. Describing strikes in South Africa's textile and garment industry in the 1970s, Iris Berger (1986) concluded that women industrial workers had participated fully in recent labor campaigns, although their specific grievances as women rarely were voiced.

Women workers in South Africa have been directly involved in collective action far more regularly than is usually recognized—in part because, as Joan Scott points out, the language of class tends to be universalist, and universal categories tend to assume male subjects (Scott 1988, 64). A

¹¹ Even for women with husbands living at home, relatively steady employment can alter the balance of power within the household. A textile worker said, "I like shift work. It gives me time to myself so that I have time away from my husband at home. I don't have to work so hard in the house and attend to my husband. . . . We don't quarrel so much when I work shift" (Mager 1989, 51–52).

1976 metalworkers' strike at Heinemann's, for example, is famous in South African labor history because fired workers successfully challenged employers and police in court. The strike involved over a hundred women workers, but descriptions of the strike, using the gender-neutral term "worker," have tended to obscure that fact.¹² Similarly, in the mid-1980s, the retail workers' union mounted one of the longest national strikes in South African history, yet reports on the strike generally failed to mention that the membership was almost entirely female (*Work in Progress* 1987).

Especially after unions were more or less legalized starting in 1979, women workers could hardly be described as docile. By the mid-1980s, labor organizers increasingly acknowledged that despite their relatively insecure position on the labor market, and despite domestic responsibilities, women workers in urban areas had often participated actively in the unions of the 1970s.¹³ Speaking in a slightly different context, Frances Baard, a veteran trade unionist and leading community activist, put it succinctly: "We know that there is no freedom [for] the men without the women" (Baard 1986, 89).

Two tendencies help explain the surprising degree of activism by women workers, each related to women's subordination at home and at work. As real wages declined in the 1970s, black workers—always poorly paid—found wages could no longer stretch to cover family needs. Thus, "the massive strike actions of 1973–74 over low wages might [be] interpreted as addressing the mounting problems of adequate reproduction for urban dwellers" whose low wages were unlikely to be supplemented by family agriculture in rural areas (Mabin 1989, 7). Women workers, especially single women with children to feed, were especially vulnerable, relegated as they generally were to low-paid jobs, yet left with primary responsibility for child maintenance. June Rose Nala, a Natal metalworkers' organizer in the 1970s, concluded, "The sense of responsibility of women to the family often contributed to their strength. Most of the women were single mothers. . . . Since [their wage] was their only source of income, the need to improve it increased their determination to fight for better wages and working conditions" (Beall, Hassim, and Todes 1989, 46). Moreover, a labor market strictly divided along racial and gender lines, in which few African women could expect to move into semiskilled or skilled jobs, meant that most women industrial workers could not hope to be given better jobs within the factory hierarchy. Thus, collective action offered the only real possibility of improved wages;

¹² Interview conducted by the author with Lydia Kompe, community organizer, Johannesburg, May 1987. (See also *South African Labour Bulletin* 1977.)

¹³ Interview conducted by the author with a Paper, Wood and Allied Workers' Union organizer, Johannesburg, July 1984.

individual mobility within a workplace was unlikely. A member of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) women's committee said, "Women's problems are the same at work and at home—low wages and low skills. They have to organize to overcome them."¹⁴

But in South Africa as in much of the world, most visible labor and community leaders were men. In the labor movement, with some notable exceptions (Lydia Kompe, Emma Mashinini, June Rose Nala), most paid organizers were male, even in industries with largely female work forces. Until the early 1980s, union activists generally echoed the nationalist movement as a whole: challenges to gender subordination were considered a threat to the labor movement's unity. Some gender-specific demands—maternity leave, equal pay, day-care centers, health care facilities, and protection for pregnant women—were included in union negotiations beginning in 1983 (Jaffee 1987), but until the late 1980s the labor movement generally subsumed women workers' needs under the needs of all workers.

It is conceivable that women workers raised issues of domestic subordination but that these were overlooked or repressed by organizers who were threatened personally by them or who feared division within the movement. In questioning labor and community activists, however, I could find no clear examples of this kind of squelching before the late 1980s. A more likely explanation is that few women felt comfortable raising such issues in mixed groups until after political mobilization and women's self-organization had changed the prevailing climate. Whatever the reason, gender relations within the working class were generally only mentioned when household responsibilities were blamed for women workers' failure to attend union meetings. Although COSATU's 1985 "Resolution on Women" recognized the "equal right of men and women to work," the sex-segregation of the labor market, and the dangers of sexual harassment on the job (COSATU 1985), COSATU's education officer, Chris Seopesenge, acknowledged three years later that this had remained "a paper resolution," because "there is little sympathy for women's problems" within the labor federation's leadership (COSATU, 1988).

Organizational resources

By the early 1990s, however, few community or labor activists would openly dismiss gender-specific concerns or suggest postponing discussions of "women's problems." Indeed, the oft-repeated description of the

¹⁴ Interview conducted by the author with a COSATU women's committee member, Johannesburg, July 7, 1991.

goals of the antiapartheid movement expanded from "a nonracial, democratic South Africa" to "a nonracial, democratic, nonsexist South Africa"—a rhetorical shift reflecting growing awareness and acceptance of gender concerns. What gave rise to the increased visibility of gender-specific demands? From the mid-1980s, in communities and within unions, women activists took up new forms of organization, creating forums in which women could articulate their own demands and drawing on new resources available for women's organizations. With increased institutional support for a gendered perspective, women activists began to raise issues in broader organizations, and these issues were gradually incorporated into the broad political agenda of the antiapartheid movement.

Participation of large numbers of working women in community groups became especially visible beginning in the early 1980s, as segregated black communities began to organize around local issues such as bus fare and rent increases, education, and the legalization of squatter communities. Emphasizing problems of urban social reproduction—especially the absence or cost of basic urban social services—community organizations often grew out of family concerns: parents concerned about the growing education crisis or adults unable to stretch low wages to cover family maintenance.

The leadership of most civic associations remained largely male, and these groups rarely addressed issues of social reproduction in gendered terms.¹⁵ But because most local issues were related to the domestic sphere, focusing on the state's failure to provide basic resources to African households, these groups were especially likely to attract women participants. While no black worker could easily overlook the close relation between low wages and the low living standards of black townships, women workers—given primary responsibility for family maintenance under both Western and African gender ideologies—were especially likely to view domestic issues in political terms. In the mid-1980s, as community mobilization was beginning to escalate into what would become a full-scale uprising, a member of the Vaal Women's Organization said, "The problem is that people . . . get low wages and can't afford [high] rent. . . . As mothers we can't afford the rent. When a child is hungry the mother is affected, and she can't afford to educate her children because the rent is high" (Barrett et al. 1985, 252). Some groups

¹⁵ Emphasizing the lack of women leaders, Seekings 1991 suggests that women's roles in the uprising were shaped by patriarchal gender ideologies and the division of household labor. However, his description completely ignores most women's organizations, and his focus on violent confrontations and arrest figures may lead him to underestimate the role of women activists in less confrontational forms of political mobilization.

were explicitly oriented toward women, such as cooperatives formed to provide alternative income-generating projects for women unemployed in the worsening recession (Beall et al. 1987).

As political organization spread and mobilization intensified, women began increasingly to organize their own groups. By 1986, separate women's organizations had been formed in most of South Africa. The United Women's Organization, for example, was formed in Cape Town in 1979; the Vaal Women's Organization was formed in 1983; the Lamontville women's group was formed in 1983; and the Federation of South African Women, first founded in 1954, was revived in the early 1980s. By the late 1980s, many of these groups had begun to articulate a visible gendered perspective within the nationalist movement.

Black South African women have a long tradition of organizing separately, and many of the new women's organizations in the 1980s explicitly drew on the women's neighborhood groups and savings clubs through which many urban African women have coped with poverty and local community problems (Barrett et al. 1985, esp. 214–23). It would not have been surprising if these new women's organizations, most of which were affiliated to broader political groups, had subsumed gender-specific issues under the banner of national liberation, avoiding discussions of gender subordination that might split the popular movement. Often led by women who sought to improve women's condition without challenging male control, these groups could, and sometimes did, see themselves as "ladies' auxiliaries" to local civic associations, not as groups planning to articulate feminist demands.

But through the uprising of the late 1980s, women activists increasingly discussed domestic issues in terms of gender relations as well as in terms of racial and class oppression. In a highly politicized environment, discussions of income-generating opportunities for women, day-care facilities, or the political basis of problems of household maintenance could lead to discussions of family relationships, as women explored the causes of their problems together. For black women, it has been argued, involvement in political campaigns sometimes served as a kind of consciousness-raising process: as more women felt a new degree of political efficacy, some activists began to distinguish gender subordination from the struggle against racial domination (Beall, Hassim, and Todes 1989). Moreover, so many women worked outside the home and participated actively in the labor movement as well as in community organizations that many groups began to challenge the assumption that women's activities were or should be restricted to the household.

Perhaps the most vivid illustration of the way political mobilization could lead to discussions of gender relations within townships was the 1986 stay-away organized by the Port Alfred Women's Organization. Shortly after its founding at the height of the 1985–87 uprising, the

organization learned that police had released a known rapist shortly after he had viciously attacked a fifty-nine-year-old African woman. The following day, virtually every working African woman in the township stayed away from work; the stay-away—a tactic that capitalized on women's high labor force participation—lasted a week. Sexual harassment appears to have been discussed openly and explicitly as a form of oppression of women, and the women's organization refused to allow the civic association's male leaders to participate in negotiations with the local white authorities. A leading activist said, "We did not want men involved in organizing or negotiating around the stayaway. Men are not victims of rape" (Forrest and Jochelson 1986). Although the alleged rapist, who was black, was protected by white police, his house was burned down, and he was eventually charged with assault. Since then, debates around the political aspects of rape and violence against women (Vogelman 1990; van Zyl 1991) reflect a growing awareness, at least among political activists, that problematizing gender issues involves moving beyond questions of equal pay to consider the links among sexuality, reproduction, and gender inequality.¹⁶

As community-based women's organizations grew in strength and visibility, activists in the labor movement also began to stress gender-specific issues. For women unionists, community issues appear to have been particularly salient, often taking priority over workplace organization; metalworker Lydia Kompe, for example, left her union in the early 1980s because of what she called a "reformist" emphasis on the shop floor and her union's refusal to address broader community problems.¹⁷ Emma Mashinini, former retail workers' organizer, has written, "The trade unions have got to follow the workers in all their travels—to get them home, and to school, in the education and welfare of their children, everywhere. The whole life of a worker needs trade union involvement" (Mashinini 1991, 119). Berger found that garment workers "saw their economic grievances as central to fulfilling their roles as women" and referred constantly to "the necessity to feed, clothe and educate their children" (Berger 1986, 232–33).

Women workers were not alone in asking unions to take up issues of social reproduction as well as issues from the workplace; male unionists also raised issues like rents and transportation, viewing these costs as

¹⁶ During late 1989 and 1990, a broad public discussion among community activists in Soweto and other townships focused on gangs involved in what was called "jack-rolling," or gang rape. Because policing in black communities for normal crimes is practically nonexistent, however, and because rape is generally underreported, it is impossible to be sure whether the increased discussion is due to an actual increase in the incidence of rape, or whether it is due to increased reporting linked to politicization of issues around gender and sexuality. Both factors may be involved.

¹⁷ Interview conducted by the author with Lydia Kompe, community organizer, Johannesburg, May 1987.

reducing their wages.¹⁸ But women's responsibilities for most domestic maintenance may have prompted them to view labor and community issues as inextricably interlocked. Berger (1989) suggests that the emergence of a broadly defined "class consciousness," where labor movements take up issues beyond the workplace, may be a gendered process, in which women workers' domestic responsibilities have made them more likely to raise community issues than their male co-workers.

Certainly this was true of the broad working-class movement that swept South Africa in the mid-1980s, which encompassed rural workers and their families as well as industrial workers and which expressed its goals in terms of all workers rather than union members alone. Clearly linked to the rise of community activism, the labor movement reflected members' understanding of the links between work and family life and made demands on the state that reflected the sphere of reproduction as well as production. The extent to which women workers differed from their male counterparts in the formulation of demands remains relatively unexplored, but as the broad labor movement spread, women workers certainly began to argue that their domestic roles gave them a special set of concerns about child care, family health, family maintenance, and reproductive rights.

To many activists, women's separate organization appeared a key first step toward ensuring that those concerns would be expressed in public debates. In 1988, when the labor federation COSATU held its first "women's conference," the debate around gender-specific demands had moved past maternity benefits and equal pay to focus more directly on how to organize women workers separately so that they could formulate and articulate their needs in an atmosphere less dominated by male unionists. Although many of the conference resolutions expressed demands that had been raised in the past—equal pay, maternity leave, health care, day care, and an end to sexual harassment by supervisors—all resolutions were worded to stress men's and women's equal responsibility for, and control within, families. The conference insisted that COSATU should help challenge gender ideologies, suggesting that it sponsor workshops on family violence and sexual harassment and on "progressive methods of equalizing relationships between men and women" and that it educate members about "the role of women as breadwinners and about the need to share childcare and housework."

¹⁸ See, e.g., Minutes of Raleigh Cycles (Nutfield) Management/Works Committee Meetings 60 and 61, n.d., and September 9, 1979, Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) archives. Topics discussed included management refusals to allow trade union meetings on premises; protective clothing and toilet facilities; overfull buses; townships; transportation for late shifts; and the possibilities of employer intervention to assist with tax refunds. FOSATU later merged with other union groups to become COSATU.

Finally, the conference called on the labor movement to campaign for free and legal abortions, address unequal property rights for women, and challenge church teachings and gender ideologies that "propagat[e] women's domestic inferior role" (COSATU 1988, esp. 17–36).

Left on paper, these resolutions might not have been particularly influential. But the conference proposed that, instead of blaming women for failing to attend meetings, the federation should seek to increase women's participation in leadership by creating separate women's groups in each union. Despite objections that such structures might divide the unions and split working women from women in communities and despite fears that women's forums would only attract women already active in unions rather than generate new participation, these structures were in place in several unions within four years.¹⁹ Organizers believed the groups helped women overcome cultural patterns that prevent women from speaking out in front of men. Shop steward Elizabeth Thabethe told an interviewer, "We have found that some of the women are more open and prepared to talk when they attend the Women's Forum than when they participate in [branch meetings] or in the congresses. They build confidence in the Women's Forum and then are able to attend and participate in other structures. They begin to understand why they are involved and that women can be leaders too. . . . From there they are able to move to other positions" (Thabethe 1991, 92). And organizer Lucy Nyembe said, "The fact of the matter is, so long as there are not women's structures, women's issues are marginalized to the extent that they are not even put on any agenda" (Shefer 1991, 55).

Forum organizers claim that the creation of a separate space in which women workers can discuss issues such as maternity rights or day-care facilities makes it more likely these issues will be elaborated, brought forward to the general union, and raised in negotiations with employers. In 1991, despite objections from unionists who feared separate women's groups would marginalize women's concerns from mainstream union activities, COSATU agreed to employ a full-time women's coordinator, responsible for organizing women's forums and conducting research into problems facing women workers.²⁰ A parallel process occurred within the broader antiapartheid movement: women activists, often representing separate women's groups, increasingly raised gender-specific issues within the broader movement, challenging nationalist organizations to take these issues more seriously and to incorporate them into a broader political agenda.

¹⁹ COSATU News, no. 1 (February 1989), 13; COSATU News, no. 2 (March 1989), 13. (See also Klugman 1989.)

²⁰ Resolution passed at the Fourth COSATU Congress, July 1991.

The spread of women's organizations and the increased visibility of gender-specific issues were certainly assisted by a growing awareness of international feminist perspectives. National debates take place within an international context, which in turn helps shape dynamics in internal discussions. South African women activists, both in exile and inside the country, were influenced by international feminist debates. There have also been more direct interventions, as international groups offered opinions and resources supporting gendered organizations and demands. Outside agencies often promoted a gendered perspective of nationalist goals. Sometimes, outside organizations raised awareness of gender-specific problems just by asking questions. A COSATU officer offered this example: "When the Canadian unions sent a delegation here, they sent mainly women, because of debates in their own unions. In addition to their regular work, they wanted to meet COSATU women, and talked to them about women's issues. It made us think more seriously about those issues than we might have otherwise."²¹ Because international donors were ready to fund programs geared primarily to women, he said, it was easier for COSATU to adopt new programs. "It made us more amenable than we might otherwise have been" to attempts to increase women's representation within union discussions and to creating separate women's forums. Other union organizers similarly acknowledge that union decisions to emphasize recruitment of women workers were sometimes designed to appeal to foreign donors, rather than simply reflecting internal demand.²²

South African activists knew that international donors, aware by the 1980s of how international aid programs have tended to neglect women's needs, were willing to support programs aimed at women; the availability of these resources almost certainly gave gender issues greater institutional support than they might otherwise have received. From the mid-1980s, several books and journals raising gender-related issues were published with external assistance, and community groups found funding for projects geared specifically to women relatively available from international church, labor, and antiapartheid groups. In 1982, for example, a Johannesburg women's group embarked on a study of apartheid's effects on working African women initiated and funded by the Catholic Institute for International Relief.²³ *Speak*, a women's magazine aimed at working women that seeks to popularize issues of women's health, family issues,

²¹ Interview conducted by the author with a COSATU official, Johannesburg, May 1991.

²² Interview conducted by the author with an organizer for the Commercial, Catering Workers' Union, Durban, June 1990.

²³ Interview conducted by the author with a member of the group that wrote *Vukani Iakhhosikazi*, Johannesburg, 1983.

and gender-specific labor issues, was funded by overseas church groups as well as by street sales.²⁴ But perhaps the most obvious example of how outside interventions could change political discourse in the antiapartheid movement occurred when Dutch antiapartheid activists brought several hundred South African women to Holland in early 1990 to discuss the incorporation of gender issues into the antiapartheid agenda. The papers presented at this conference have been criticized for a tendency to correlate "women" with motherhood, but debates at the conference and the views of Dutch feminists clearly affected the way many South African participants viewed gender issues (Charman, de Swart, and Simons 1991). A Durban community activist said, "I had already thought women had special issues; but the Dutch feminists, and some of the South African exiles we met in Holland, made us rethink the relation between those issues and the anti-apartheid struggle"—especially the importance of raising gender issues during the process of social transformation, rather than waiting until after attaining national liberation.²⁵

There seems to be widespread agreement among activists that foreign interest has helped strengthen the institutional framework in which gender-specific issues have been raised. This tendency, however, does not imply that gender-specific issues are a foreign import. Indeed, the Cape Town's United Women's Organization specifically voted to reject international donations for organizational work in order to avoid unnecessary dependence—although, even in this unusual case, funds were accepted for "special projects" such as a day-care center. But international donors' interest in gender issues clearly helped make gender-specific programs more acceptable. As one community activist concluded, "Access to that kind of money does affect the way people think about issues."²⁶

The extent to which gender-related issues had been incorporated in debates within the popular nationalist movement became clear in January 1991 when an academic conference in Durban designed to bring together gender-related research provoked controversy, not from those who wished to postpone discussion of divisive feminist issues but instead from those who believed conference organizers should have focused on community concerns rather than on academic research. In the heat of the debate, few commented on how surprising it would have been a decade earlier if any community activists had been willing to attend such a meeting (e.g., *Agenda* 1991; Horn 1991). Activists who almost certainly

²⁴ Interview conducted by the author with a member of the *Speak* editorial board, March 1987.

²⁵ Interview conducted by the author with a Malibongwe participant, Durban, July 1990.

²⁶ Interview conducted by the author with an FSAW activist, Johannesburg, August 9, 1991.

once would have considered gender issues divisive were remarkably insistent that these issues now had a grass-roots constituency and could no longer be postponed. While community activists warned that academic interventions could distract from issues of immediate importance to women in the nationalist movement, their concern was more about whether community women's voices would be heard in the feminist discussion than whether any discussion of feminism at all would distract from the struggle against white supremacy.

Gender on the national agenda?

Since early 1990, when the South African government removed its bans on political parties, released most political prisoners, and allowed exiles to return, debates about the transition to majority rule and about the system of governance to follow apartheid have been heated—and have included questions about how gender issues will be addressed. Few South African women easily accept the label “feminist” even now, but the problematization of gender relations and the household has increasingly been included in broader debates within the antiapartheid movement. Within the urban popular movement, support has clearly emerged for demands that in another context would be labeled feminist: equal access to work, shared family resources and responsibilities, and challenges to male political and social domination, even in the private sphere. No one could claim that gender-specific demands are fully incorporated into the agenda of either the ANC or the labor movement, nor can one be sure how far these discussions are carried into personal relationships. Nevertheless, at least in the public arena, debates in the early 1990s indicated that gender relations and ideologies were questioned more and more within important working-class and political organizations.

Within the ANC's Women's League—an organization that previously insisted on postponing discussion of gender until after liberation—activists have insisted on raising gender issues during negotiations toward majority rule. Officially launched inside South Africa in early 1991, the league has been marked by a far more assertive feminist approach than had been expected by most of its organizers, mainly returned exiles. A returned exile said after the launch meeting that she had been “stunned” by the extent to which “ordinary delegates wanted to raise feminist issues”—from a gendered job market and the double day to sexual harassment and male attitudes within political organizations.²⁷ Another delegate said, “The grassroots delegates knew what their problems are,

²⁷ Interview conducted by the author with an ANC Women's Section officer, Johannesburg, May 1991.

and could describe them in great detail; the leadership has to learn to listen.”²⁸ League officials claimed that even activists who still draw on traditional images of women as wives and mothers have recognized the changing terms of the debate: “The older women speak a different language but they are not resisting the changes” (Daniels 1991).

After its launch, league officials planned both to continue to encourage women's participation in national antiapartheid campaigns and to continue a campaign to draw up a new “women's charter” to be included in the constitutional arrangements for a future government. Unlike an earlier document with the same name, this charter was to be created through consultation with local women's groups across the political spectrum, in a process designed to encourage debate among women about their needs.²⁹ By holding public meetings about what would be included in the charter, the Women's League hoped to develop broad consensus among women about issues such as maternity and child-care rights, gender oppression within family units, unpaid labor within the household, control over fertility, violence against women, and property rights (Maurice 1991). While recognizing that differences of race, age, class, education, and political perspective divide South African women, the Women's League hoped to explore common themes by focusing on gender relations within the household and on social relations that perpetuate gender subordination.

But perhaps the Women's League's most controversial proposal was that the ANC adopt a quota to ensure that women were included in its national leadership—a proposal illustrating the Women's League's growing insistence that women's voices be included in negotiations. In July 1991, fifty new members were to be elected to the ANC national executive committee. The Women's League asked that 30 percent, or fifteen positions, be given to women, arguing that unrestricted elections would merely perpetuate a long history of gender-based discrimination in which women activists worked within organizations but were rarely given leadership positions.³⁰ The Women's League's insistence on a quota stood in direct contrast to its long history as a ladies' auxiliary organization; delegates asked “that the organization honor its commitment to women,”

²⁸ Interview conducted by the author with a United Women's Organization executive committee member and Women's League member, Cape Town, July 1991.

²⁹ While the new Women's Charter will certainly include new issues—reflecting both the broader process through which it is being drawn up, and the way that circumstances and language have changed since the 1950s—the process probably has greater legitimacy in the eyes of many ANC activists than it might have had if the earlier charter had not existed.

³⁰ The proposal was somewhat confusing. The Women's League's initial proposal had apparently been to ask that 30 percent of nominees be women, leaving delegates to vote freely. At the ANC's national congress, however, the proposal was presented in terms of elected positions, not candidates.

arguing that women were already active participants at the grass-roots level and that only affirmative action could overcome institutionalized gender oppression (Turok 1991, 9).

If it had been accepted, the quota "would have gone a long way in giving a practical demonstration of the ANC's expressed support of affirmative action" (Serote 1991). The debate nearly derailed the entire ANC conference: supporters of the motion, both male and female, insisted that only a quota would avoid the familiar pattern restricting women activists to mid-level leadership, while opponents argued that a quota would limit delegates' free choice. Although the national leadership appeared to support the proposal, ordinary delegates—83 percent of whom were men—rejected the principle. More controversial than any other issue at the week-long meeting, the proposal never came to a vote; after three hours of heated debate, the Women's League withdrew the resolution, replacing it with a vaguer resolution in support of affirmative action (Turok 1991, 9). Ultimately, only nine women were elected to the national executive committee, and of these, as Women's League activists pointed out, nearly all had remained relatively silent during the quota discussion.³¹ Several women activists who had been expected to win election to the national executive believed they had been penalized for their vocal support of a quota.³²

As this quota debate revealed, demands that directly challenged male control of popular organizations were still likely to meet a great deal of resistance in organizations dominated by male activists. In 1989, a CO-ATU congress had similarly tabled resolutions condemning sexual harassment of women workers by union organizers and calling for conscious efforts to elect women leaders. As in the ANC, national union leaders' support for feminist demands was outweighed by objections from rank-and-file male delegates (Obery 1989). Recognizing the pattern, a furious ANC activist commented, "Backward attitudes of male superiority and female inferiority need to be changed in both men and women. Nelson Mandela told the racist court in 1962 that he felt he was a black man in a white man's court. Women should not feel in the ANC and other democratic organizations that they are women in a men's movement. A genuine commitment to end discrimination against women is needed, in practice and not just in declared policy" (Mayibuye Correspondent 1991).

Strong opposition to challenges to traditional gender ideologies should hardly come as a surprise; such opposition is hardly limited to nationalist movements. Far more surprising is the extent to which activists within the

³¹ The actual number of women on the ANC's national executive is greater, because several women are among the thirty-two ex-officio members.
³² Interview conducted by the author with a Women's League officer, Johannesburg, July 20, 1991.

ANC have begun to insist that the nationalist movement address gender concerns directly. Shireen Hassim warned, "We need to maintain a healthy scepticism about the ability of the post-apartheid state to meet the demands of women, or to anticipate policies which will empower women. . . . Unless the Women's League begins to intervene actively in these debates, the possibility grows that women's concerns will be marginalized yet again" (Hassim 1991).

These debates illustrate the extent to which gender issues have been problematized, at least in public debates. Without household-level research, it is hard to draw any conclusions about whether personal relationships are changing; at least at the level of public discussions within the nationalist movement, however, gender issues have clearly gained new prominence. Indeed, in early 1992, the Women's League created a special committee to work with the ANC's negotiating team to ensure that all proposals for new government structures included some consideration of gender issues,³³ and the league joined thirty-nine other women's organizations from across the political spectrum to discuss possible constitutional proposals (Baker 1992).

While it would be foolhardy to predict what will happen during the process of transition, it seems undeniable that feminist demands within the South African nationalist movement emanate not from a few educated women or the national leadership but from within precisely the popular base from which the ANC draws its support. To a far greater extent than other nationalist movements attaining power, the postapartheid state will certainly face popular pressure to give women equal access to resources, jobs, training, and property, as well as pressure to question male control within the household. That pressure will come from women who are already economically independent, who have organized in independent and semi-independent women's groups, and who clearly insist that gender-specific issues must be addressed in the transition to a democratic society.

Conclusion

Until the mid-1980s, a postapartheid South African state seemed likely to mirror the experience of other nationalist movements, where male activists would seek to recreate households that assumed male dominance. In the 1990s, however, such reconstruction seems far less likely, in part because the peasant economy has been undermined, but also because women, initially mobilized against the state, have increasingly incorporated gender issues into their understanding of the problems they confront.

³³ Personal communication to the author from Jacklyn Cock, April 1992.

Three distinct, though related, processes have created a social basis for popular feminist demands in South Africa—demands that challenge gender subordination and male-dominant gender relations within the popular movement. First, the gender-specific effects of the migrant labor system have undermined the peasant economy; once in power, the nationalist movement is less likely to seek to reconstruct peasant households, a goal that seems repeatedly to have subverted feminist goals in more agrarian-based movements. Second, the high labor force participation of African women in South Africa has created an unusual degree of economic independence among women, increasing the likelihood that women could participate in unions and community groups and strengthening the recognition that women's activities are not confined to the domestic sphere. Third, the involvement of significant numbers of women in community and labor organizations—especially in separate women's forums—has allowed the articulation of gender-specific demands, not for a family wage for male earners but for increased equality for women both inside and outside the home. In an international context that provides support and resources for raising gender-specific issues, South African activists have begun to place gendered demands on the national agenda.

Historically, nationalist movements have tended to respond to demands articulated by male household heads, overlooking the ways in which women have sought to restructure society. Similarly, the demands of working-class women have repeatedly been subsumed by demands for a family wage, reinforcing male authority within the household. In South Africa, we can watch in a contemporary setting the formation of a nationalist and working-class consciousness and observe the extent to which women activists articulate a somewhat different agenda than do their male counterparts. As women activists organize a broad constituency for gender-specific demands, it seems increasingly probable that the demands they make on the postapartheid state will seek to create an unusual degree of support for women's economic independence and personal autonomy.

Department of Sociology
University of Wisconsin—Madison

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From Al-Anon to ACOA: Codependence and the Reconstruction of Caregiving

Janice Haaken

OVER THE PAST DECADE, the United States has seen a burgeoning of self-help groups that offer aid to individuals seeking to emancipate themselves from "codependent" or "addictive" relationships. The vast current literature on codependence provides an array of guiding texts for these groups, outlining both the nature of the pathology that underlies anguished attachments and the path to recovery from codependence or love addiction. In addition, a veritable army of therapeutic gurus offering specialized treatment and workshops for this newly identified population of sufferers has emerged, both reflecting and shaping the ideational tone of this self-help movement.

Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA), a Twelve Step program¹ that developed out of the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Al-Anon traditions, has been particularly active in promoting recovery programs for "love addicts" or "codependents." Alcoholics Anonymous, established in the 1930s by two men, is the prototype for ACOA and other Twelve Step recovery groups. Yet it was Al-Anon, an organization formed in 1951 by wives of alcoholics recovering in AA, that initially recognized the pathogenic effects on family members of living with an alcoholic. Adult Children of Alcoholics, which has grown phenomenally since its inception in the late 1970s, focuses on the pathology of attachments based on what it defines as excessive caretaking or assuming responsibility for others.

¹ The term "Twelve Step program" refers to a program's adherence to some version of the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (see Appendix). There is considerable flexibility in the interpretation of "God," or what many call their "Higher Power," in Twelve Step groups. Some feminists in Twelve Step groups describe this higher power as "the Goddess within." Others describe it as "my higher self." While the spiritual (some would say religious) aspects of the Twelve Step philosophy have been controversial, and for some the basis of objection to the philosophy, that issue is not central to this analysis.