CHAPTER - III

WOMEN AGAINST APARTHEID
It is clear from the previous two chapters that women were subjected to discrimination and oppression under apartheid. Women did resist such a system. They not only took part in the liberation struggle but also fought against the laws that deprived them of their basic rights. Women's resistance to apartheid can be studied under -

(1) Anti-Pass laws Movement
(2) Political campaigns
(3) Trade Union Movement

ANTI-PASS LAWS MOVEMENT

Resistance to pass laws began when the control mechanism inherent in the pass laws became intolerable and the victims rejected its legal authority. Three case studies are used to explore women's resistance to passes in South Africa. They are - Bloemfontein (1913), Potchefstroom (1930) and Johannesburg (1956-58). Each discussion of resistance is preceded by a brief analysis of the social, political and economic context which shaped the lives of African women in a particular place and time. The case studies are chosen on the basis of the availability of data. Nevertheless, they illustrate the social dynamics operating at three different periods.

The Bloemfontein Resistance (1913)

Before looking into the resistance, it is important to deal with the history and lives of Black women in Bloemfontein. Women in Bloemfontein had limited range of career options which fell into four categories¹ -

(1) those who made an independent but illegal livelihood out of beer brewing and prostitution,
(2) those who performed domestic service for the Whites.
(3) those who took up home-based informal economic activities, and

(4) those who depended entirely on the income of males in return for work in their own homes.

These categories were not rigid as women shifted between them. No matter what economic or occupational stratum a woman fell into, her everyday life was affected by the restrictions of pass laws. It is important to mention that Pass laws were not applicable to women anywhere else excepting the Orange Free State. Residential passes were required for each person over the age of sixteen who lived in the urban areas. These passes had to be purchased at the cost of one shilling a month and it listed the person's name, means of subsistence, stock and other possessions along with the name of his or her employer.²

Since washerwomen had no single employer, their laundry permit served as a residential permit. A mandatory service book for domestic workers substituted for the residential pass and gave full particulars about the worker as well as listed the terms of the labour contract entered into between master and servant. It had to be carried at all times and produced on demand by the police. Another provision was that the employer could enter comments about the character of the servant and the reasons for termination of service. Police could detect those who left service without successfully completing their labour contracts. The Native Pass Office in the location kept a central registry of all servants and served informally as a labour bureau. Every servant was required to report to this office within three days of beginning or ending of a job. Those Whites who wanted to hire a servant paid one shilling fee to the Native Pass Office to obtain full details about any person who was not employed at the time.³ By law anyone could be stopped anytime and asked to produce a pass. Failure to meet pass law requirements meant a fine of up to R5 or 

² Law 8 of 1893 and 1907 Location Regulations.
³ Orange River Colony Government Notice (ORCGN) No.380 of 1907, Amended Domestic Servant Regulations for the Town of Bloemfontein.
one month in prison with hard work. Three such convictions were sufficient to have a woman or man expelled from the urban areas. Enforcement of Pass laws was left to local government and the revenue accruing from the issue of all the permits was an attractive prospect for the White municipalities.

The municipal authorities insisted that the main purpose of passes was to combat illegal brewing and prostitution and force women into legitimate work. In practice pass laws were used to regulate the terms of domestic service. They were designed to discourage desertion from service and to provide incentives for employees to comply with employers' demands to get a favourable endorsement in their service book. The 1904 census reported that 81 percent of all female prisoners were domestic workers. Thus, deserting servants who broke contracts were jailed while no effort was made to arrest prostitutes or brewers. It is clear that the Whites found disobedient servants more threatening to social order than the prostitutes or brewers. In reality, it was easier for the women in illegal occupations to obtain passes than the legitimate workers. Illegal brewers managed passes by paying bribes and kickbacks to law enforcement officers. When women protested against passes, the brewers did not join. It was in their best interests to keep their passes intact to prevent the police from prying into their homes and breweries. Both African and White observers pointed out that the easiest way for a woman to get a pass was through performing sexual services for a White man as any White could write a note to the Location Superintendent claiming that he employed an African woman, entitling her to a pass without further question. This practice led African leaders during the resistance to insist that pass regulations actually caused prostitution. According to them, the penalty for pass violations was severe enough to prompt

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4 Wells, n.1, p.29.
5 Bloemfontein Town Council Minute Book (BTCMB), December 10, 1910.
6 Wells, n.1, p.29.
7 Ibid. p.30.
8 Ibid.
some women to choose prostitution rather than risk arrest. Even legitimate domestic servants were forced to spend the night with a White employer in order to get the passes to which they were entitled.

Further, women were vulnerable to sexual assault and harassment from African police constables. Even women with up-to-date passes were subjected to body searches and dragged into the police station for questioning. The pass system made it unsafe for women to be anywhere in town. Women reported cases of policemen waiting at the water taps, Churches, municipal wash houses and even entering homes to demand the passes and officials sjambokking (whipping) women inside the pass office. Passes thus gave police an easy pretext for confronting women. It is not easy to assess the extent of physical harassment, assault and rape by police. Though many cases went unreported, the level of outrage in the African community gives some indication of its prevalence. The women condemned the pass laws as having "a barbarous tendency of ignoring the consequences of marriage" and alleged that "a pass throws to pieces every element of respect to which they are entitled." In their petition to parliament, the women cited two cases in which convictions for rape were obtained against White officials. African men objected to a situation in which their wives were abused by any passing policeman. Despite numerous accounts of sexual abuse related to the enforcement of pass laws, White officials remained unanimous in denying that any such problem existed. Their persistence in turning a blind eye to such a serious state of affairs contributed significantly to the women's resolve to resist. Moreover, both men and women argued that the unique character of women as wives and mothers made it particularly repugnant to apply passes to them. By imposing on women the risk of

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9 Minutes of public Meeting of Natives Held at Waaikoek, December 2, 1913.
10 Bloemfontein Town Clerk Correspondence, Petition from Natives and Native Women carrying passes, June 16, 1910.
arbitrary arrest, passes directly threatened the well being of the family where children are neglected. Thus women resisted as passes interfered with their domestic responsibilities.

In 1910, the South African Act gave a new ground upon which women could resist passes. The unification of four colonies into one nation required uniformity of policies. This gave new hope to the Africans. African leaders came together in 1909 in the South African Natives Convention which met in Bloemfontein under the presidency of Walter Rubusana. This body represented the first attempt of African leaders from the four colonies to undertake unified political action. The convention stressed that passes for women existed only in the Free State, not in other colonies. They cited deep resentment against women's passes and claimed that there was no justification for them whatsoever as revenue could be raised through taxes and criminals could be dealt with under other laws, if these were the aims of the pass laws. All these petitions and delegations were met with indifference. Free State officials simply claimed that the petitions had no legitimate cause for complaint as the existing laws were fair and reasonable.\(^\text{12}\)

In this context APO began advocating passive resistance as the only method of redressing African grievance. In their newspaper, started in 1909, Dr. Abdurahman wrote on Gandhi's passive resistance. He spoke of passive resistance as "the greatest and yet most harmless force anybody can wield with perfect safety and a clear conscience."\(^\text{13}\) He called for united action among all the African races - "To my mind the whole native problem could be solved if Coloureds, Natives and Indians would all take to passive resistance. What could the Whites do if the Natives understand the meaning of passive resistance? They would be brought to their

\(^{12}\) Orange River Colony Governor's Office (ORCGO), Letter from Abraham Fischer, Prime Minister, June 25, 1909.

\(^{13}\) APO (Cape Town), December 4, 1909.
senses, for they could not do without us. South Africa would collapse in twenty-four hours if we stood together." APO thus influenced the form of women's resistance. In 1912 Abdurahman specifically called on African women of the Free State to engage in passive resistance as the only solution to municipal stubbornness on pass laws.15

In 1912 women formed Native and Coloured Women's Association which carried out the resistance through petitions and deputations. Women successfully circulated a petition throughout the Free State towns, collecting five thousand signatures in protest against passes. A delegation of six women then travelled to Cape Town and presented their petition to the Minister of Native Affairs, H. Burton. There was no positive outcome. A year later when no changes were made in the way pass laws were enforced, the women resorted to passive resistance. At a community meeting on May 29, 1913, the location women pledged to refuse to carry passes any longer and expressed their willingness to endure imprisonment.16 Two hundred infuriated women marched through the centre of the town and demanded to see the Mayor. In an interview the next day he told them that the women's pass laws was the responsibility of the Union Government and that there was nothing that the local officials could do to change the law.17 Not satisfied with his response, the women provoked the police into action. They surrounded the location police station, tore up their passes, threw them to the ground and informed the police that "rather than carry a pass they would suffer untold agonies and imprisonment."18 A total of eighty women were arrested and ordered to appear before the magistrate the next day. Their court appearance the next day provided the occasion for another public demonstration of African women. Mrs. Molisapoli led a dancing, singing, chanting,

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14 APO (Cape Town), February 26, 1910.
15 APO (Cape Town), June 1, 1912.
17 The Friend (South Africa), May 31, 1913.
18 Ibid.
shouting procession of six hundred women through the centre of Bloemfontein to the Magistrates court. When the police tried to control the crowd, the women retaliated. APO described what happened - "On 6 June, 600 daughters of South Africa taught the arrogant Whites a lesson. Headed by the bravest of them, they marched to the magistrate and kept shouting and cheering until he addressed them. They proceeded then to the Town Hall and when the police tried to keep them off the steps, the gathering got out of control. Sticks could be seen flying overhead and some came down across the skulls of police. The women declared - We have done with pleading, we now demand". This incident marked the beginning of passive resistance campaign which spread to all Free State towns.

The scale and intensity of the demonstrations made a strong impression on the observers. APO declared that "We the men, who are supposed to be made of sterner stuff, may well hide our faces for shame and ponder in some secluded spot over the heroic stand made by Africa's daughters." In a campaign in Winburg, White women even advocated their own march in solidarity with the Africans. Moreover, the female passive resisters who adopted blue ribbons as a sign of their participation in the campaign were dubbed "our local black suffragettes" by the White Press.

Spontaneity, enthusiasm and informal organisation characterised the campaign. There was no overall-strategy, nor did the women have the support of an organisation that could sustain and direct the campaign. In 1913, the women's tactics ultimately produced the desired result. Through the OFS Women's Association, the resisters successfully gained national media coverage for their cause and won the sympathy of Union Government officials in Cape Town.

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20 Ibid.
21 The Friend (South Africa), October 11, 1913.
22 Wells, no.1, p.57.
outcome was a relaxation of the rigour of pass law enforcement for women in the Free State and the eventual exclusion of women from pass laws on a national basis in 1923. Another tangible result was the establishment of the Bantu Women's League within the ANC.

This campaign indicated how strongly women felt against passes and what an explosive issue it could be. It is interesting to note that pass laws provided an area of common experience for both men and women that was exclusive to the Africans. From the beginning African women's political behaviour was shaped in terms of their community of interest with African men. However, women reacted more strongly as they were subjected to sexual harassment. Further, passes interfered with their role as wives and mothers. The campaign had nothing to do with the women's rights movement in the West then. It can in fact be argued that in defying the law African women were protecting their traditional role.

**Struggle in Potchefstroom (1930)**

The struggle in Potchefstroom was against the lodger's permits. In 1927, the location Superintendent, A. J. Weeks, stressed the difficulty of keeping track of who lived in the location and, proposed to impose a two shilling per month fee for every lodger's permit. In January 1928 Weeks's new provision became effective. All the people over the age of 18 years had to apply monthly for a permit to reside in the location unless they were registered stand holders, their wives or minor children. The superintendent had the power to refuse anyone's permit by giving one month's notice. The occupier of any dwelling was obliged to report the arrival and departure of any visitor who is without a permit. The Superintendent had sole say whether dances, parties or any other forms of entertainment were to be allowed in the location.

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23 Ibid, p.58.  
24 PMCH, January 27, 1928.
Resentment of the fees was intense especially among the women. They were not singled out for abuse nor were arrested for not having lodger's permits, but the system threatened their way of life in the following ways -

(1) The integrity of family life was threatened. Children of those who were not stand holders had to buy these permits to live with their own parents. This often coerced them into employment against their will. Adults left home for better employment opportunities. This not only increased the economic problems of women but also their household responsibilities.

(2) Women suffered from financial setback from the loss from lodgers whose rent formed an essential part of the household budget.

(3) The beer-brewers were particularly targeted. They did not like the close monitoring of their personal circumstances. Unlike in Bloemfontein, they played an important role in the resistance.

As women were affected in so many ways they began to resist. Their goal was the total abolition of the fees and return to the system in which permits were given free. They started their campaign against the permits. The campaign merged into the agenda of the Communist Party under Josie Palmers' leadership as head of its women's section in Potchefstroom. Women held their own meetings to air their grievances, but all actions were taken jointly with men.\(^\text{25}\) Ferment over the new lodgers permits prompted the Communist Party leaders from Johannesburg, Rebecca Bunting and Mary Wolton to convene a special women's meeting in Potchefstroom in 1928 and Mrs. M. N. Bhola, an ANC women's organiser and ally of James Thaele in the Western Cape accompanied them.\(^\text{26}\) The extent of the role played by the Communist Party in the resistance is obscure. But the presence of Edwin Mofutsanyana and S. M. Kults, both officials of Communist Party who lived in Potchefstroom posed special problem for Weeks. He denied lodger's permits to

\(^{25}\) Wells, n.1, p.71.

\(^{26}\) Walker, n.19, p.49.
them but they defied and stayed. Weeks persuaded the Town Council in March 1929, to revive an old section of the by-laws providing that huts in the location could be sold by the city if rent payments fell one month behind. Such action implied the possibility of a sudden forced ejection of the defaulting tenant. Reacting to this, a delegation of local residents including Josie Palmer had meetings with Public Health Committee, Commandant of Police and the Magistrate. They raised grievances concerning the payment of lodger's fees and the way evictions were carried out. As a result of this meeting the compulsory age for carrying permits was raised from eighteen to twenty-one.

The focus of African resistance moved into the court room at the end of April 1929. When the local Magistrate fined Petrus Kälie, a Communist leader, for living in the location without a permit, he appealed on the grounds that the whole set of location regulations were invalid, and the Town Council could not prosecute anyone under such regulations. According to Josie Palmer, this case was the beginning of the well co-ordinated women's work. Women organised mostly at night. They carefully planned strategies for dealing with various court cases, organising meetings and demonstrations and sending deputations. This was their main activity for more than a year. Women gathered by singing in the streets, moving from street to street until all the women had assembled. Women developed their own tactics especially in cases of ejection for failing to pay rent. For instance, when a family was ejected, the women went to the place where the furniture was kept and carried it back to the same house. They invited the police to arrest them.

At this stage the resistance was organised by the Communist Party. Most residents joined the party and extended their support. The popularity of the Communist Party derived less from a full understanding of its doctrines but from the fact that it was

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27 PMCH, March 29, 1929.
28 Wells, n.1, p.72.
perceived as an organisation that helped people with their problems and enhanced their status. Moreover, the communists played a substantive role when it came to the court cases. By May 1929, Petrus Kalie won his case in the Supreme Court on the technicality that no formal approval of Minister of Native Affairs had been obtained in establishing the location under the provisions of 1923 Natives Urban Areas Act. The communists further helped to take another case to the Supreme Court in October 1929 challenging the validity of the lodger permits. But the Supreme Court dismissed this case giving the Town Council a victory and affirming its right to enforce the lodger permit system strictly.

The Communist Party gave a call to all the location residents to attend a mass meeting to protest the pass system on Dingaans Day, the December 16, 1929.29 When Dingaan's Day arrived, several hundred African men and women assembled to listen to the Communist Party speakers. Over one hundred armed Whites joined the crowd. The District commandant of police sent thirty White and fifteen African police to contain the situation and a special interpreter came from Pretoria to take notes.30 Mofutsanyana spoke first describing the misery created by pass system. He stated that the effigies of White political figures would be burnt. Then J.B.Marks began to speak when the White police suddenly attacked both the speakers. The Blacks retaliated by throwing stones. Weeks opened fire and injured six Africans. Weeks was arrested by the police and fourteen Whites were charged with public violence. The location residents were bitter about the shooting. Josie Palmer observed - "For hooligans, to shoot a Native is but to break a Black bottle and then congratulate themselves on being such good marksmen."31 She further claimed that

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29 Dingaan's Day was celebrated by White South Africans in commemoration of the day in 1838 when Voortrekkers repelled a large attack of Zulu Warriors under order from permanent chief Dingaan.
30 Justice Department, Letter from District Commandant to Deputy Commissioner, South African Police, Transvaal Division, December 17, 1929.
it was difficult to protest against the killings as justice had not taken its course. The full trial did not take place until June 1930, six months after the events.

On January 20, 1930 Mofutsanyana was found guilty in the Magistrates court for refusing to obey an order from the location Superintendent to leave town. His residential permit had expired. The Dingaan's Day shooting case was on the same day. Formal charges of public violence was sustained against twelve Whites and a charge of murder was upheld against Weeks.\(^3\) Having lost his own right to remain in Potchefstroom, Mofutsanyana cashed on the emotional climate created by these hearings and called for a complete work stay away. The women responded enthusiastically. They made plans to "bring the town to a standstill."\(^4\) The women took a general accounting of all the location residents to see who was willing to participate in the action and who was not. The Sub-Inspector of the African Police, J. C. Hatting, warned them that such pickets were illegal and action would be taken. Undaunted by his threats, the women persisted in their organising throughout the night. By 6.30 a.m. on January 27, 1930, the location residents began assembling for their march into town. According to Palmer, the women guarded the roads and not even a single person was allowed to pass. Two men tried to ride their bicycles through the women's pickets, but were forcibly knocked down and made to go back. A few women were appointed to go from house-to-house searching for unco-operative individuals and several men were pulled out from under their beds where they were hiding.\(^5\)

By 9 a.m. no one went to work in the town. In an orderly procession with four abreast, three hundred men and two hundred women marched from the location to the Court House.\(^6\) In spite of some kind of antagonism between men and women,

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\(^3\) Wells, n. l, p. 75.
\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Ibid.
when it came to public action, they presented a strong united front. The procession reached the destination at 10 a.m. where the Mayor, the Magistrate, an Assistant Magistrate and Sub-Inspector of Police Hatting were waiting for them. When asked about their problems one of the representatives put it as "to protest against the lodger's permits, nothing more and nothing less." Their main problem was with the Location Superintendent. They handed over a written statement of their complaints. It stressed the inability of people to pay their loader's fees because of their low wages. The residents of the location expressed intense dissatisfaction with the events. But diplomatic intervention by Hatting prevented the proposed actions from materialising. The Town Council met the next day and agreed to suspend all prosecutions on lodger's fees for fourteen days until the Native Affairs Department studied the situation.

On January 30, 1930, D. W. Hook an 'additional Native Commissioner' was sent from Pretoria by the Department of Native Affairs, to take evidence from all parties. The Advisory Board had half the members, the appointees of Weeks and the other half were those elected in 1927. In the proceedings Josie Palmer was the spokesperson. Their grievances were aired ranging from lodger's permits to white-washing of houses in the location. Summarising the nature of the hearings, commissioner Hook acknowledged that the chief complaint was the forced payment of the lodgers fees and secondly the manner in which the location superintendent enforced the regulations. Hook assured the African residents that their problems would be looked into. He felt the hearings had been helpful in clarifying the nature of the problems. Two weeks later, the Native Affairs Department sent Mr. A. R. Wilmot, the local Magistrate to explain Hook's findings to the location residents. Some changes in the lodger's permit system were recommended essentially eliminating the need for children of any age to get permits to live with their parents.

36 Palmer Interview, Herald (South Africa), January 28, 1930.
37 Herald (South Africa), February 4, 1930.
This was welcomed but the residents lost control when they were told that it was concluded that local superintendent Weeks was a "capable and an efficient officer."38

The residents were convinced that nothing had changed since the Hook study. Therefore on March 16, 1930, the residents resolved to embark on a passive resistance campaign refusing to pay for their lodger's permits and facing jail. The decision was advertised throughout the location. The campaign went ahead and many were arrested for not paying the lodger's fees during the month of April.39 And the situation reached a stalemate. But wider public opinion began to have an impact. Under the combined pressure of People's resistance and the English Press, the Department of Native Affairs and the Communist Party, the Town Council finally gave in. In May 1931, it drew up a new budget, dropping the fees for lodger's permits. Higher stand rents replaced the lost revenue. To relieve further tensions, the Town Council consulted the location residents before taking a final vote. At a public meeting convened by the Town Council, the location residents approved the new rates for stand rents. The decision was not unanimous as three hundred and twenty-eight location residents signed a petition objecting to it.40

The removal of lodger's permit fees restored peace in the location. What emerged was a clear sense of how control mechanisms whether defined as passes or permits are resisted. In this case, the residents especially those belonging to the Communist Party used law against law. This awareness signalled the need for carefully worded laws and clear procedures for their enforcement. And if the laws were to be the tools of control, they had to be made foolproof capable of withstanding the resisters who were lawyers and were aware of the loopholes in law.

This episode is different from the Bloemfontein struggle in the following ways -
(1) Potchefstroom case occurred under conditions of labour surplus rather than shortage, reflecting the rapid urbanisation which characterised the era.

(2) Communist party influenced the women to choose a dramatic form of resistance - a total withdrawal of the towns African labour force.

The Potchefstroom resistance appears to be a conflict between the White-dominated municipality and the rising popularity of communism in the location, with the Department of Native Affairs actively intervening to prevent violence and defuse grievances. This view is not incorrect, but it obscures the fact that women were the initiators and leaders of the resistance. The central issue, payment of monthly fees for lodger’s permits technically affected men and women alike, yet women responded differently.

The Anti-Pass laws Movement in Johannesburg (1956-1958)
African women throughout South Africa resisted the National Government’s efforts, formally started in 1956, to introduce passes for women. In the first seven months, the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) estimated that approximately 50,000 women took part in 38 demonstrations against the pass laws in 30 different centres.41 Although women’s passes were universally despised, the intensity, form and duration of resistance varied from town to town and city to city. Johannesburg warrants special attention for two reasons. Firstly, the resistance there was particularly intense, and secondly as Johannesburg served as headquarters of the leading political organisations, the events there were well-documented. Many factors contributed to the particular forms of resistance that took place in Johannesburg. It is important to look into these factors before dealing with the resistance against pass laws.

41 Walker, n.19, p.193.
Johannesburg which started as a mining centre in 1986, attracted African migrant workers. Although the proportions of African men and women were balanced, male migrancy shaped Johannesburg's social environment. African women faced a number of constraints on their employment options. The domestic service sector was occupied by African males. Therefore, financial viability came through beer brewing and prostitution which were illegal. Women's options for legal employment were limited but expanded. With the growth of industry which characterised the 1930s, African men moved out of domestic work into industrial jobs. Thus the market opened up for women as domestic workers. There was no African unemployment after 1936 but rather a shortage of labour in the domestic service sector. Even the 1939 report claimed that 95 percent of all working women were in domestic work but even that was inadequate to meet the demand. The next highest category of reported female wage earners was self-employed women. Nurses, midwives and dressmakers fell under this category. Other jobs included tailor's assistants, cashiers, waitresses and cooks in restaurants and assistants in general dealers shops. However, a good deal of female earning power was not reported. This include the income from lodgers, illegal brewing and non-licenced hawking and vending. Jobs in industry itself began to open up slowly as the number of women so employed rose from 144 in 1935 to 422 in 1939. Women entered the industrial labour force for the first time in large numbers and continued to enjoy an open market for domestic work. With comparatively high wages paid by industry, women left domestic service to take up factory work. Within the manufacturing sector, they were at an advantageous position as they did not carry passes, which made them eligible to join trade unions, which their men could not do.

42 Johannesburg Native Affairs Department (JNAD), Report for 1936-37, Civic Centre Library, Johannesburg.  
44 Ibid.  
45 Ibid.
When the National Party came to power in 1948, a harsh system of control was imposed on women's economic opportunities. Despite the government's commitment to dual labour control, it gradually introduced a gender-inclusive pass system. In 1950 a leak to the press that the government was contemplating legislation to include women in the pass laws triggered scattered, un-coordinated women's unrest and demonstrations in protest throughout the country. A firmer commitment to total control came with the passage of the Natives Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act in 1952. This act provided for the replacement of all previous passes for Africans with a new reference book mandatory for both men and women to carry at all times. The Minister of Native Affairs insisted that this law was not designed to make African women carry passes and that it would be implemented only when White women were required to get their identification cards. By 1953 the National Party announced that reference books for African women would be issued from 1956, on a voluntary basis.

The threat of passes for women provided an issue around which all women could unite. The mere idea struck most as a deep insult to their very womanhood, random arrests, sexual abuse and sudden imprisonment. The daily menace to their menfolk of the pass laws and the knowledge of what passes had meant to the women in the Free State, combined to fuel an intense outrage. Through their experience in previous congress campaigns, local community initiatives and trade unions, women were poised and ready to spearhead a protest movement built upon an unprecedented level of massive popular resentment. In Johannesburg, from the early 1950s the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) became active. A branch structure emerged in the townships through which women participated in various ANC campaigns ranging from transport boycotts to the Defiance Campaign and the boycott of Bantu Education. The founding of the Federation of South African

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46 *Debates, 1952, Minister of Native Affairs, Verwoerd.*

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Women (FSAW) in 1954 gave the movement a broader and women-centred agenda and organisational boost.

On October 27, 1955, 2000 protesters went to the Union Buildings. A delegation of four women, one from each racial group delivered piles of written protests to the government offices. On December 14, the ANCWL held its first national conference in Johannesburg. After this meeting, the Federation and the ANCWL setup a joint working committee to co-ordinate the emerging women's anti-pass campaign. Over 2000 women showed up for a Transvaal Women's Day conference on March 11, 1956 to air their grievances. The Bantu World reported that "many were nearly weeping as the hardships of men were described."\(^{47}\)

Since the new female reference books were not yet mandatory, the women resolved on a campaign to persuade African women to refuse to take the books. The resistance strategy called for peaceful protest demonstrations at all local Native Commissioner’s offices. The idea was that the commissioners would eventually convey to higher government authorities that women despised passes. A demonstration in Pretoria was called for August 9, 1956. This time it was to include women from all over the country in much greater numbers.\(^{48}\) Local demonstrations at Native Commissioner's offices took place throughout 1956, as planned. Thousands of women marched - singing, shouting and chanting - to convey in advance how strongly they opposed passes. Though there is little information as to who supported these demonstrations, it seems that the leadership remained politically committed working women, often from trade union backgrounds, while the followers were generally housewives.\(^{49}\)

\(^{47}\) Joseph Interview, Bantu World (Johannesburg), March 14, 1956.
\(^{48}\) FSAW, Resolutions of Transvaal Women's Day Conference, March 11, 1956.
\(^{49}\) A 1955 report of the FSAW claimed, "all officials of the Federation are working women", while in personal interviews numerous people claimed the average demonstrations were 'housewives'. PSAW, Report of Transvaal to WIDF, 1956.
On August 9, 1956, 20,000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria. They were dressed for festive occasion, African women wearing their manyano uniforms, brightly Coloured saris for the Indians, Sunday best for Coloureds and Whites and ANCWL uniforms for the Congressites. Many women brought their babies along to "show who they were demonstrating for." Eight leaders, two from each racial group forced their way into the office and handed over bundles of protest letters which pointed out what passes would mean:

- that homes will be broken up when women are arrested under pass laws,
- that children will be left uncared for, helpless, and mothers will be separated from their babies for failure to produce a pass,
- that women and young girls will be exposed to humiliation and degradation at the hands of pass-searching policemen,
- that women will lose their right to move freely from one place to another.

After handing over hundreds of petition forms at the office of the Prime Minister, women stood in complete silence in the winter sun for thirty minutes, then burst into magnificent harmony to sing the anthems, Nkosi Sikile'i Afrika and Morena Boloka. The women began a new freedom song "Now, you have touched the women, you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder, you will be crushed." Nearly 500 women stayed over in Orlando for the second national conference of FSAW. The day after the demonstration, Lilian Ngoyi was elected as the new president and Helen Joseph as the new secretary - now at a national level. At this meeting the Federation adopted a constitution which confirmed its structure as strictly an

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50 Bantu World, (Johannesburg), July 29, 1956.
51 Wells, n.1, p.112.
52 Hilda Bernstein, For Their Triumphs and for Their Tears - Women in Apartheid South Africa (London), 1978, p.47.

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alliance of organisations. Individuals could not join directly, but could only participate as members of an affiliated body.

In a number of ways the 1956 demonstration marked a turning point in Black women's struggle against passes. It was impressive evidence of the power of angry but highly organised women. For male political leaders, both Black and White, it meant that women had to be taken seriously as a force. Within the Congress Alliance, this resulted in an effort to harness the women's energy into its programmes. A memorandum issued after the October 1956 meeting of the National Consultative Committee (NCC), praised the women for their efforts and criticised men for "adopting a passive attitude".53 It expected women to be in forefront temporarily, enabling a new sector of the population to become politicised.

The government's drawing recognition of African women as a serious political threat had many repercussions. Within weeks of the demonstration, many ANC leaders were arrested for trivial offences. Lilian Ngoyi, for instance was arrested for being in the Moroka Emergency Camps without a permit.54 In early December many officers of the Federation and the ANCWl were amongst the 156 resistance leaders nation wide charged with high treason.55 State force was thus exercised on women and their organisations.

The first women's passes issued in 1956 were to women in small towns and rural areas. The government coerced rural women into taking passes through various forms of pressure, including arrests and shooting, where resistance was strongest. But women burnt their passes. After initial burning of passes, events escalated to include heavy fines, jail sentences, murder, home-burning and exile. However,

53 FSAW, Memorandum on National Anti-pass Campaign from National Consultative Committee, October 25, 1956.
54 Bantu World, (Johannesburg), September 1, 1956.
55 Personal Interview, Dorothy Nyembe, Cape Town, August 14, 1996.
without the new pass, old age pensioners could not collect their pensions, husbands would not pay taxes to get the essential receipt and children were blacklisted from attending any school in the nation. The government at times closed schools, post offices and discontinued bus services.

African women in Johannesburg first experienced the direct effect of passes when legislation required them to produce identity numbers, obtainable only from a reference book, before they could be legally registered as nurses. The ANC women were not for gentle persuasion. More than 1,000 women assembled at Sophiatown's Freedom Square on 21 October to march to the pass offices. Under the leadership of Maggie Resha, a nurse by profession, they started making their way toward the Central Pass Office in Market Street, Johannesburg. The police contingent intercepted them in a White residential neighbourhood along the march route, and using loud speakers, ordered them to disperse. About half the women started to leave, but the women in the front of the crowd taunted the policemen. They tried to continue by ordering the crowd to break into twos and threes to avoid constituting an illegal procession. But the police surrounded them and arrested over 500 women. That afternoon a crowd of 250 women descended on the Newlands Police Station and sought arrest but the police refused. The idea of adopting a strategy of passive resistance and deliberately seeking imprisonment spread quickly. The next morning, another 250 women succeeded in getting themselves arrested. Women crowded into the pass office in Bezuidenhout Street and then declined to participate in registration. They refused to leave on order and were subsequently threatened with arrest for obstruction. With this news the women broke into loud cheering followed by boisterous singing and dancing until the police vans came. They cheerfully assisted the police by opening the doors of the vans.

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56 Bantu World, (Johannesburg), October 25, 1958.
57 The Star (Johannesburg), October 21, 1958
58 Ibid.
59 The Star (Johannesburg), October 22, 1958.
The women needed a comprehensive strategy to deal with this uncontrollable outpouring of resentment against passes. The protest-in-batches planned a week earlier had never anticipated the possibility of wholesale arrest. With 934 women in jail, no one knew what to do next. In the uncertainty, a few anxious husbands bailed out their wives but many prominent ANC leaders supported their imprisoned wives. Nelson Mandela acted as attorney for the group and spent long hours in consultation with them. Other husbands such as Andrew Mlangeni and Walter Sisulu brought food daily.

On October 25, the Joint women's Executive of the Federation and the ANCWL met. A FSAW report stated - "It was strongly and unanimously felt that no further bail should be paid and that demonstrations to the pass office should continue as long as the support of the women could be maintained."\(^{60}\) The campaign then appeared to have almost unlimited potential. The Executive then made arrangements to assist the families of imprisoned women, provide food for those already in jail and expand campaign to factory workers through the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). On October 26, the women of Alexandra Township sought arrest with great enthusiasm. The arrest of Alexandra women and other volunteers brought the total number of arrested to nearly 2000.

The Federation leaders received notice that the newly elected Transvaal Provincial Executive of the ANC was entirely responsible for all aspects of the anti-pass campaign, thus superseding the role previously played by the Transvaal consultative committee of the Congress Alliance. The ANC justified this decision on the grounds that within the Congress Alliance structure each organisation was responsible for its own racial group. It argued that the anti-pass campaign needed to expand to include men. In order to carry out a unified struggle, women should

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\(^{60}\) FSAW, Report of FSAW, 1958.
wait until the same kind of grassroots support was forthcoming from the men.\textsuperscript{61} Bail was to be raised and women brought out of prison. Given the Congress Alliance structure, the Federation women acquiesced.

It was a difficult decision which had implications at several levels. Many ANC men felt the impact of the women's imprisonment affected personally as most of their own wives were involved. As nearly 2000 African households were deprived, unexpectedly of a prominent female member - wife or mother - children became a problem. Members within the ANC criticised the involvement of the Whites, Indians and Coloureds through the Congress Alliance, in a campaign which made such deep inroads into people's personal relationships and home lives. Within a month of the women's arrest, these critics broke away and formed the Transvaal Africanist Congress. Clearly, factors of race and traditional gender roles intertwined to play a key role in the eventual decision to bail out the arrested women.

The decision to bring the women out on bail proved to be particularly pivotal, as it in effect defused the intense energy of the women's struggle. The optimism of Federation leaders over the women's capacity to carry the passive resistance further was rooted in their recognition of the fundamental issue at stake. The women resisters were struggling to draw the line at State interference with what they perceived to be their fundamental roles as care providers in the home. Passes threatened to undercut this primary role, which lay at the very core of many women's sense of identity. Experience had already proved what an irreconcilable conflict women faced when torn between home and work.

The failure of the male leaders of the ANC to understand the basic gender dynamics which underlay the situation led to the mistaken assumption that women's energies

\textsuperscript{61} FSAW, Report of ANC, 1958.
could simply be redirected into other campaigns or placed on hold until men 'caught-up'. The moment of decision for the women would never come again in quite the same way. After they were bailed out, the steam of their protest dissipated and could not be retrieved. While theoretically, a united campaign of both men and women might have appeared ideal, the reality of the situation clearly indicated otherwise. By demanding that women be restored immediately to their traditional homemaking roles, African men dismantled the strongest protest to date against State interference with those very roles.

The mass arrests launched the struggle over passes for women into a critical new phase. The government no longer refrained from using force against women. This was demonstrated when the first group of women came out of jail on bail on October 1, 1958, 3 days after Alexandra arrests. A crowd of over 1000 well-wishers assembled outside the court to greet them. The women came out defiantly raising their fists and shouting Afrika ! and the crowd responded with wild excitement. The police teargassed and charged the crowd of mostly women, hitting slashing and kicking. The newspapers carried photos of African women running and screaming as the police lashed out at them.62

Federation women resolved to carry on the struggle against passes, through constitutional means. They targeted the Mayor whom they held responsible for the way passes were being administered in the townships. They organised through the press, pamphlets and ANC branches. City officials warned that anyone participating in such a demonstration would be arrested. On the day of event, police boarded commuter buses leaving Sophiatown and threatened to arrest anyone who took part. Nevertheless 2,000 women turned up. The Mayor agreed to meet the deputation of women. One of their chief complaints was against raids. They condemned the fact


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that reference books were now required for resettlement in a house in the new
townships. Also, they perceived the newly created municipal labour bureaux as the
first step towards getting women endorsed out of the city altogether. Although the
Mayor heard the women's complaints, he did nothing to address them.

Women experienced the full coercive force of the State as it tried to institute passes
for women. Despite the retreat from passive resistance forced on them by ANC
men, FSAW sought ways to continue their struggle. The Federation organised the
Transvaal Provincial Conference in January 1959. It drew women from wider
geographic area...ANC had declared 1959 as 'the greatest anti-pass year ever' and
had formed special planning council to draw up detailed plans of how both men and
women were to engage in this new phase of the campaign. However, neither ANC
nor the Federation had any plan to offer. As a Federation report at the time put it - "The Federation awaits direction from the ANC as to the course the anti-pass
campaign will follow, and requests that this direction may be given in the very near
future, lest the militant spontaneous resistance of the women and their admirably
displayed capability for controlled and organised action be allowed to fall away.
Women await with impatience the active entry of men into the anti-pass
campaign."63

Their wait was in vain. The programme presented for the women to follow in the
coming year was that of the Congress Alliance - to build local anti-pass committees,
boycott nationalist firms, boycott potatoes, observe Africa Day on April 15 and make
June 26, the anniversary of Congress of People, a night-day of protest. None of
these campaigns, however, carried the same urgency for women as their own
anti-pass campaign.

Instead of building on the strength of their militancy and determination, the women retreated apologetically. Lilian Ngoyi called on women to temper their militancy, warning that - "the impression seems to be gaining ground that the women are courageous and militant while the men are frightened."\textsuperscript{64} She cautioned that this contributed harmfully to many internal disputes. Chief Albert Luthuli, ANC president, in his greeting to the women on Women's Day, 1959, tried to give the problem a positive aspect by suggesting that the women's example should motivate men to take similarly determined courses of action. "Men seem too cowardly and timid. Women are putting men's traditional dignity and so-called superiority in great jeopardy. Do African men of our day want to play second fiddle to women?\textsuperscript{65} The force of male patriarchy indeed ultimately triumphed over the women's zeal for fighting passes.

During the 1950s African women in other urban and rural centres continued to demonstrate their militancy and willingness to go beyond strictly constitutional forms of protest. In both Lady Selborn, near Pretoria, and Cate Manor, near Durban, when women's passes became linked with re-housing schemes, doubling the threat to 'unqualified' women, strong resistance was met with excessive police force, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries. In rural Natal, forced cattle dipping schemes, imposed at the same time as the introduction of women's passes, triggered an explosion of bitter resistance. In the Cape, there were wholesale eviction of large numbers of women from the cities.

In Johannesburg passes drove women into the wage labour market since formal employment recorded in the pass offered the easiest guarantee of right to remain in the city. The new Native Labour Regulations, published on January 9, 1959, brought women under identical controls to men. A special labour bureau for women,

\textsuperscript{64} FSAW, Presidential Address to ANCWL conference, September 5-6, 1959.
\textsuperscript{65} FSAW, Message from Albert Luthuli, 1959.
opened. An official stamp, verifying that they were employed or were seeking work offered the only possibility for many women to remain in the urban areas. The vast majority of women who reported to the labour bureau registered for domestic work as this was the only avenue of employment open to them. Women lost the choices enjoyed before and accepted unfavourable jobs and wages.

The coercion, combined with the dual demands made on women as wives and workers placed them in a position to recognise, even before their men, the limitation of challenging the apartheid State through constitutional protest alone. Time and again sheer desperation led them to engage in acts of civil disobedience. Eventually men caught up. Eighteen months after suppressing the women's campaign, male leaders of both ANC and PAC launched gender-inclusive campaigns against the pass laws. The State responded far more brutally to male protest killing unarmed demonstrators at Sharpville and Langa on March 21, 1960. Within the next two years resistance evolved from passive resistance to sabotage to armed struggle. Women played little role in defining this transition other than pushing the men through their own example.

WOMEN IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Women joined political parties like African National Congress (ANC), Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), South African Indian Congress (SAIC), Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), African People's Organisation (APO), Coloured People's Organisation (CPO), Congress of Democrats (COD) and formed women's organisations like Federation of South African Women (FSAW) to resist the laws of apartheid. Some of the important campaigns in which women were involved are -

1. The Passive Resistance Campaign (1946)
2. The Defiance Campaign (1952)

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66 Wells, n.1, p.126.
The Passive Resistance Campaign (1946)

The Indian women in Natal and Transvaal adopted the new liberation technique of satyagraha that Gandhi introduced. Between 1906 and 1913 Gandhi led a campaign of passive resistance against a number of measures that discriminated against Indians like the Transvaal law which made passes compulsory for all Indians over the age of eight, a law that prevented Indian migration into the Transvaal and a R3 poll tax that was levied on Indians in Natal. Moreover, in 1913 the Supreme Court declared that all non-Christian religious marriage ceremonies were invalid. In 1912, the women defied the anti-Asiatic Law, crossed the provincial border and provoked the miners of Newcastle to strike. One thousand workers began the march led by Gandhi across the Natal border into the Transvaal. The entire Indian labour force of Natal went on strike bringing the industry to a standstill. Arrests and imprisonment followed and the government was forced to modify the laws against Indians. The important woman leader was the "emaciated young Valiamma, who refused to surrender despite her fatal illness that developed as a result of repeated imprisonment." She died in the struggle. Though the participation of women in the passive resistance campaign set a precedent for later years, unlike the contemporary struggle by African women against passes in Bloemfontein, it did not lead to any attempts to organise women as a group. Once the offending measures were withdrawn, Indian women retreated.

In 1941, a Durban-based Liberal Study Group formed 'Women's Class'. In the inaugural meeting, their president I. C. Meer noted that "non-European women had

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not had sufficient opportunity to contribute to the struggle of their people" and expressed the hope that women's class would become a powerful women's organisation.\(^68\) It was the first women's group established among Indian women. It marked a new era of female participation in the Indian Congress. In 1940s, Dr. Goonam was a prominent women in SAIC. She was a doctor practising at that time. She joined the anti-segregation committee with the Natal Indian Congress (NIC). In 1944 she spoke at a meeting held in Durban in support of independence for India.\(^69\) By 1946 she was the vice-president of NIC. In March 1946, the Guardian described her as "one of the few Indian women playing a leading part in the political struggle of the Indian people of this country."\(^70\) At this time women activists within SAIC were from well-off and educated background. They were in a relatively stronger position to reject the traditional stereotype roles assigned to women. Very few Indian women had either the economic independence nor education to challenge those structures which confined them to home.

Nevertheless, political developments in 1940s broadened women's participation in politics. One important development was the pressure put on Indian homes by the 'food crisis' of the war years. The impact of rising costs and erratic distribution of food stuffs hit all women hard. In Durban, Indian women organised in protest. In 1946 the Guardian carried a report on Mrs. L. Govender, an illiterate woman who was taking a leading part in organising local women against black market food in Durban. The Guardian commented: "Mrs. Govender, who is a leader of a food squad is symbolic of the growing political consciousness of the Indian working class women in Natal, who, since the commencement of the food raids, have demonstrated in the streets of Durban, demanding the cessation of the black market and the selling and rationing of food."\(^71\) According to the report, there was a

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68 Walker, n.19, p.108.
69 Guardian (Johannesburg), February 2, 1944.
70 Guardian (Johannesburg), March 21, 1946.
71 Guardian (Johannesburg), June 6, 1946.

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growing realisation among these women that the food struggle was only one aspect of a wider struggle against the oppressive laws of the country.

The launching of passive resistance campaign in June 1946 initiated a new phase of political activism amongst Indian women within the SAIC. Congress leaders made attempts to draw women into the campaign. Dr. Goonam took the lead. In March 1946, when the campaign was in its planning stages, a large meeting of 'hundreds' of Indian women was held in Durban to discuss what their role in it should be. The Guardian described the meeting as the first of its kind among South African Indians: 'Speakers were Goonam, Fatima Meer and Mrs. N. P. Desai.' The meeting pledged its support for the campaign and elected a committee to direct support along practical lines. Once the campaign was under way, women came forward as volunteers. Six of the 17 people who initiated the campaign were women. Four of them came from the Transvaal - Zainap Asvat, Zahna Bayat, Amina Pehap and Zubeida Patel and two from Durban in Natal - Lakshimi Govender and T. M. Pather. They entered Natal without permits and got arrested. In the Guardian's news coverage, photographs of women participants featured prominently. In 1947, speaking at the anniversary of the launching of the campaign, Dr. Goonam singled out the fact that women had marched, 'side by side with the men' as 'the greatest factor in the year's resistance.'

In fact, the number of women participating was not large. According to Simons and Simons, about 300 of the 2,000 passive resisters who went to jail were women. But the fact that these women participated had repercussions throughout the Indian community. In October 1946, 3 women were elected to the Transvaal Indian

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72 Guardian (Johannesburg), March 23, 946.
73 Personal Interview, Fatima Meer, Durban, August 21, 1996.
74 Personal Interview, Amina Cachalia, Johannesburg, July 23, 1996.
75 Guardian (Johannesburg), June 10, 1947.
Congress (TIC) executive committee, the first time women had ever held such senior posts. They were Zainap Asvat, Mrs. P.K. Naidoo and Mrs. Suriakala Patel. In Natal, Dr. Goonam was elected acting chairman of the Provincial Passive Resistance Council. As individual women became prominent within the SAIC, they began to forge links with women activists in the CPSA and ANC. In 1946, Dr. Goonam appeared at the International Women's Day Meeting organised by the CPSA in Johannesburg. The closer co-operation that existed between the ANC and SAIC after 1947 encouraged contact between their women members. In 1950, Goonam appeared on the platform at an African women's anti-pass meeting in Durban and pledged the support of Indian women in the fight against passes. Her presence and her speech indicated that by that time women in the national liberation movement were aware of the importance of solidarity.77

The Defiance Campaign (1952)

The Defiance campaign was planned in 1951 by a Joint Action Council of ANC and SAIC. It was directed at six specific laws namely the Pass Laws, the Group Areas Act, the Separate Representation of Voters Act, the Suppression of Communion Act, the Bantu Authorities Act and the compulsory cattle culling policy. The campaign was planned to take place in the following three stages according to the report of the Joint Planning Council -

(a) **The First Stage**: Commencement of the struggle by calling on selected and trained persons to go into action in the big centres for example Johannesburg, Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, etc.

(b) **Second Stage**: Number of volunteer corps as well as the number of centres of operation to be increased.

(c) **Third Stage**: Mass action which as far as possible cover the whole country.

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77 *Guardian (Johannesburg)*, April 6, 1950.
The method to be used was peaceful. "A unit of volunteer corps were to be called upon to defy a certain aspect of the Pass Laws. The unit chosen goes into action on the appointed day, enters the location and holds a meeting. When confronted by the authorities the leader and all members of the unit court, arrest and bear the penalty of imprisonment." In addition to invading locations, volunteers would enter facilities - railway waiting rooms, post office sections, public seats and railway compartments - reserved for Europeans only.

The campaign began by sending letters to the Prime Minister Dr. D. F. Malan by ANC and SAIC. The Congresses presented him with an ultimatum that if the laws against which the campaign was directed were not withdrawn by February 29, 1952, the Defiance campaign would begin. The government rejected the proposal and the campaign started off. ANC and SAIC had called for 10,000 volunteers and about 8,000 came forward (Eastern Cape: 5,719, Transvaal, 1,900 and Natal 250). As per the instructions, the volunteers defied laws, courted arrest, refused bail and accepted imprisonment. The politicising impact of the anti-pass campaign encouraged a large turnout of women. In one sample of group of defiers in the Eastern Cape, 1,067 out of a total of 2,529 were women. In another sample in Transvaal 173 out of 488 defiers were women. The offences committed were technical offences carrying light sentences and not imposing excessive hardship on the volunteers. Some successes were achieved. Prisons became overcrowded and the machinery of law enforcement clogged. The increasing momentum of the campaign led to stricter enforcement of the laws. Heavier penalties were imposed and these dampened the spirit of the volunteers.

79 Ibid.
80 Walker, n.19, p131.
The government began to take repressive steps against the leaders involved in the campaign. Acting under the Suppression of communism Act, it ordered five communist leaders - Moses Kotane of the ANC's national executive committee, J.B.Marks, President of the Transvaal ANC, D. W. Bopape, Secretary of Transvaal ANC, J. N. Ngwevela, Chairman of the Cape Western Regional Committees of the ANC and Dr. Dadoo, President of the SAIC - to resign from their organisations and stay away from political gatherings. The President of ANCWVL then, Florence Matomela was one of the 35 leaders arrested and charged by the State under the Suppression of Communism Act. The government banned the left-wing *Guardian* which reappeared as *The Clarion*. It deprived Samkahn and Fred Carneson, former communists, of their seats as Natives Representatives in Parliament in the Cape Provincial Council, respectively. It placed bans on Michael Harme active in the Transvaal Peace Council and E.S.Sachs, the left-wing leader of the Garment Workers' Union. But all these leaders violated their bans.

The campaign continued. During the campaign the acts of defiance were often accompanied by freedom songs, the thumbs up signs and cries of Afrika. The campaign spread from Port Elizabeth and East London to the smaller towns in the eastern Cape province, from Johannesburg to a dozen centres on the Witwatersrand, to Cape Town and a half-dozen smaller centres in the Western Cape. In all these places people defied laws and were arrested. By the end of the year 8,500 people of all races had defied. The campaign which started peacefully took a violent turn. There was rioting in Port Elizabeth (October 18), in an African hotel in Johannesburg (November 3), in Kimberley (November 8) and in East London (November 10). In confused circumstances of angry crowds, stone throwing and firing by police about 40 persons were killed, hundreds injured and government buildings and churches damaged. About six Whites were killed including a

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81 Nelson Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life* (Bombay, 1990), p.34.
(medical) nun whose body was mutilated. The government blamed the campaign for the disorders. But as Leo Kuper concluded: "there was no evidence to connect the resistance movement with the disturbance nor was violence at any time advocated by the resisters as a means of struggle". While the national working committee of the ANC claimed that the riots had been deliberately provoked.

The rioting excited attention from the Whites. A small number of liberal or left-wing Whites strengthened contacts with non-Whites and identified themselves with the aims of the campaign. The leaders of Defiance Campaign welcomed White support and reaffirmed that their resistance was against unjust laws and not against Whites. In order to build active White support, the national action committee announced a public meeting in Johannesburg in mid November. Over 200 Whites participated and the left-wing Whites identified themselves with the aims of the campaign. They took part in the provisional committee elected by it. Eventually in 1953 they organised the Congress of Democrats as an ally of the ANC. Defiance itself was a means by which Whites identified themselves with the campaign. Whites defied laws and got arrested. For example they entered into Germiston Location where seven were arrested. Especially notable was the fact that the leader of the Germiston batch was not a left-wing activist but an anti-communist by name Patrick Duncan.

ANC won important achievements. The general political level of the people raised as they became conscious of their strength. The ties between the working people and the Congress strengthened. Though the campaign never approached the stage of mass resistance it did transform ANC into a mass movement. African people were politicised. Political enthusiasm was enhanced though no measure of this is available. Songs, the thumbs up sign, the ANC flags and cries of Afrika! contributed

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to mass enthusiasm. Of far-reaching importance was the growth in numbers of men and women whose commitment to the movement was intensified by the experience of jail and the popular recognition it carried. The defiers became a source of future political educators and leaders.

The Defiance Campaign was an important stimulus for the ANCWl in key areas on the Rand and in Eastern Cape and helped the formation of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) in 1954. A number of new recruits to the Women's League entered politics through the campaign. The campaign further led to the formation of anti-cisionalist organisations and groups among the White population. The first of these was the Congress of Democrats which later took its place in the Congress alliance in the support of the ANC. Another was the Liberal Party formed as a non-racial party in 1952. This party began with a policy of qualified franchise which was changed to universal franchise. It dissolved itself in 1967 when non-racial political parties were prohibited by law. Thus, the campaign was a success in demonstrating both to Whites and to Africans the potential power of African leadership, organisational skills and discipline and the readiness of Africans to co-operate with other non-Whites. Yet the campaign came to a standstill by the end of 1952. The supply of volunteers declined and family hardships intensified especially after the riots. The government enacted the Criminal Laws Amendment Act. This Act provided Congress with a reason for the official termination of the campaign.

**Congress of the People (1955)**

This plan was proposed by the President of the ANC in the Cape, Professor Z. K. Matthews. The aims of the campaign were to maintain interest in Congress and to divert the political energy generated by the Defiance Campaign into fresh channels before it was dissipated. The Congress of the People was to be a new "national
convention' in which all South Africans could express their wishes on the future form of South African society. Its purpose was to draw up a Freedom Charter for all peoples and all groups in South Africa. The 'national convention' proposed was to be "a mass assembly of delegates elected by all the people of all races in every town, village, farm, factory, mine and kraal". In this assembly, the Freedom Charter was to be chalked out from the demands submitted by the people. These demands need not have to be political but were to be harnessed to political ends. The message cannot inspire people unless it is linked with their problems and issues.

This far reaching proposal was given substance at a meeting of the executives of the ANC, the SAIC, the CPO and COD presided over by Chief Lutuli in March 1954. It was agreed to convene a 'Congress of the People' through which masses themselves could express their own demands and wishes. Special committees were to collect the demands and were made responsible for organising the election of delegates to the Congress of the People itself. The election was to be held in open meetings and every person present is eligible to vote. The size of the voting unit was left to the local committees. All units need not be of the same size. Power was thus given to the local committees to see to it that voting units were so made up as to ensure the election of 'suitable' candidates. Demands by the people were to be expressed at open meetings. The Committees would therefore, not only perform important organisational functions for the Congress of the People, but would be useful after its conclusion. Above all it must be remembered that the "creation of a network of local committees in every corner of South Africa will in itself be a major political achievement which will be of tremendous value in every struggle of the future to achieve the demands set out in the Freedom Charter." ANC hoped that

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these Committees would constitute a framework on which an expanded Congress would be built.

The joint campaign committees organised thousands of meetings in urban and rural areas, in factories and mine-compounds and in the prisons. The committees heard people's grievances, collected their demands and forwarded them to the organisers for incorporation in a people's Charter of rights. The campaign continued for more than a year. When the National Consultative Committee approached the Federation of South African Women in August 1954 to assist with the Congress of the People, FSAW accepted and declared: "It is our responsibility to gather women of South Africa to acquaint them with our aims, to acquaint them with the Congress of the People so that women can play their part in the struggle for freedom." The organisers intended it to serve a dual function - to act as a demonstration of mass popular support for the Alliance and its policies and to provide local organisers with a focus purpose to mobilise Congress branches and recruit new members. In mobilising women, the FSAW urged its regions to hold house meetings and local conferences at which the idea could be popularised, women's delegates elected and the demands of women for incorporation within the proposed 'Freedom Charter' formulated. These meetings were to discuss and approve a draft pamphlet entitled 'What Women Demand' that FSAW wished to submit to the convenors of the congress.

'What Women Demand' focused mainly on issues relating to health care, education, housing, social services and food. It provoked discussion within congress. Two aspects were particularly controversial. What did provoke strong criticism was a call for the provision of medical, education and shopping facilities in the reserves. A group of Congress supporters saw that implicit in this demand was an acceptance of

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the notion of separate reserves for Africans which was political and economic discrimination. They criticised the women strongly for their failure to think the issue clearly. Subsequently, in a letter to New Age in July 1955, the FSAW accepted their criticisms and retracted this demand. According to Cherryl Walker "in retracting its position so quickly, the FSAW was being unnecessarily humble." The reserves presented the Congress Alliance with a complex and contradictory set of political and strategic problems with no simple solutions. Merely ignoring those areas because they formed a part of an unacceptable policy did not solve the problems of basic survival confronting the people living there - nor did it assist those people to develop their own strategies for resisting the very policies which kept them in an impoverished and dependent position. It was much easier to criticise the FSAW than to offer viable alternatives. The second controversial aspect was a call for birth control clinics. Sex and sexuality were not socially sanctioned topics for public discussion. In raising this issue at a public meeting, the FSAW was breaking new ground. The idea of a woman being able to control whether and when she would have children challenged the existing attitudes and provoked discussion both within and without FSAW. Its inclusion in the list of women's demands sparked off a lively discussion which touched upon many fundamental issues relating to the position of women in the family.

On June 26, 1955, the Congress of the People was held at Kliptown, near Johannesburg. The preparations had been hampered by continuous police interference. Organisers were arrested and the meetings disrupted. Even on the eve of the Congress road blocks were set up and stopped many delegates from reaching the venue. Yet over 3000 made their way to Kliptown. Chief Lutuli and Dr. Dadoo were banned by ministerial order. At the meeting discipline was maintained in the face of police raids. Of the political and social organisations that were invited

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86 FSAW letter to the Editor, New Age, July 9, 1955.
87 Walker, n.19, p.182.
to participate, only the Liberal Party responded favourably. It too withdrew its support when the radical influences behind the Congress of the People became evident. The withdrawal of the Liberal Party left the Congress of the People campaign representatives only of the ANC and its allies. Although women were drawn into the planning of the congress of the people, their participation at the actual meeting was limited. Out of 2,848 delegates assembled only 721 i.e., one quarter were women. Women made few speeches from the floor and the only female speaker on the platform was Helen Joseph, who was then Transvaal Secretary for FSAW and a member of the national executive for COD. She was given the task of proposing the clause on 'houses, security and comfort' in the 'Freedom Charter'. The convenors clearly regarded this as a women's concern, a view that FSAW's 'What Women Demand' endorsed. The Congress of the People ratified the Freedom Charter. The following are the important provisions of the Charter:

(1) The people shall govern.
(2) All national groups shall have equal rights.
(3) The people shall share in the country's wealth.
(4) The land shall be shared among those who work for it.
(5) All shall be equal before the law.
(6) All shall enjoy equal human rights.
(7) There shall be work and security.
(8) The doors of learning and of culture shall be opened.
(9) There shall be houses, security and comfort, and
(10) There shall be peace and friendship.

The women demanded for their rights and issues to be included and succeeded in incorporating Women's Charter in the Freedom Charter. The Charter thus demands

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Note: The text references a source indicated by 'Ibid, p.183.'
rights which are honoured in every country, an equal say for all in the process of making and administering laws, equal access to education, culture and economic opportunities for all men and women, regardless of race or colour. The Charter is not a socialist manifesto. It demands for the redivision of the land among those who work on it and the nationalisation of mineral wealth and industries which were monopolised. These demands are justified in the light of the historical realities of the country where the White minority has forcibly appropriated all the country's land and assets rather than adherence to socialist doctrine on the part of all those who made and support the Charter. Yet in Mandela's words - "the freedom Charter is a revolutionary document precisely because the changes it envisages cannot be won without breaking up the economic and political set up of present South Africa." And it is for this reason that the ruling classes in South Africa regarded the Charter as "high treason".

**Treason Trial (1956-1961)**

The regime regarded the Freedom Charter as 'High Treason' and for eighteen months after its adoption police raided homes to collect "evidence". On December 6, 1956, 156 men and women were arrested and charged with High Treason. Frances Baard was one of the women leaders who was charged in the Treason Trial. From the dock she called on others - "No matter where you work, unite against low wages... unite into an unbreakable solidarity and organisation." Helen Joseph was a listed person under the Suppression of Communism Act, and therefore arrested for treason and eventually became one of the two Whites in the first group of those accused in the Treason Trial. Florence Matomela was yet another women leader who was among the 156 defendants in the Treason Trial but the charges against her were withdrawn a year later. Dorothy Nyembe was also

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90 Ibid.
arrested and charged in the Treason Trial.\textsuperscript{93} Fatima Meer organised fund raising events for the families of the Treason Trial defendants.\textsuperscript{94}

The Treason Trial went on for four-and-a-half years and ended in the acquittal of all the accused, but together with increased ban and Security Police action it helped to slow down the whole protest movement. In 1957 and 1958 there were widespread revolts in many country areas including those involving the women's anti-pass campaigns. All these were met with excessive cruelty, assaults on people, and burning of their homes and possessions. June 26, 1957 was the start of a campaign of boycott which became illegal soon and the tightening network of new laws and police activity brought ever-increasing repression and brutality. This becomes evident in the Sharpville massacre.

The Sharpville Massacre (1960)

ANC decided to launch protests against the pass laws in 1960. Learning ANC's programme, the PAC called its own 'anti-pass campaign' a week earlier. Africans were summoned to go to local police stations and deliver their passes in 'a non-violent way'. This campaign was not successful in many areas. But in two areas, Sharpville in the Transvaal and Langa in the Cape, crowds of Africans peacefully assembled at the police stations on March 21, 1960. In Sharpville, up to 20,000 came to the police station in a peaceful demonstration against the pass laws. Police opened fire where 67 Africans were killed and 186 wounded including 40 women and 8 children. More than 80 percent were shot in the back while they were fleeing.\textsuperscript{95} This came to be known as the Sharpville Massacre. Theresa Ramashamola is one of the six sentenced to death for the killing of the community councillor Sam Dlamini during the demonstration. She said in the court that on the

\textsuperscript{93} Personal Interview, Dorothy Nyembe, Cape Town, August 14, 1996.
\textsuperscript{94} Personal Interview, Fatima Meer, Durban, August 21, 1996.
day of the demonstration she had gone home early after being hit on the head by a rubber bullet and had not even known that Dlamini was dead. In detention, she was tortured. At the time of her arrest she was only 24 years.

The Sharpeville Massacre marked the beginning of a repressive era. A state of emergency was declared. ANC and PAC were both banned. Massive arrests were made under new restrictive legislation. A stay-at-home demonstration planned for the last three days of May 1961 did not succeed after the police arrested more than 18,000 Africans in raids. A further two thousand men and women of all national groups known or thought to be active in the ANC and other democratic organisations were arrested and detained for months without trial. The ANC and PAC were declared as illegal organisations. It was this crisis coupled with all the previous acts of repression which convinced both the masses and their leaders that resistance cannot be confined to 'non-violent' and 'legal' methods. The ANC functioned throughout the emergency. The Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) which was declared illegal in October 1959, produced the first issue of *The African Communist* in Johannesburg. All the leaders of the liberation movement concluded that "it was necessary to abandon 'non-violence' as the sole means of struggle, and to begin preparations to meet state violence and terror with retaliatory violence."

**Armed Struggle (1961)**

On December 16, 1961, acts of sabotage marked the emergence of Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) which later became the armed wing of the ANC. Nelson Mandela was a founder member and commander-in-chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe. The explosions were accompanied by the distribution of their manifesto.

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96 *Sechaba* (London), March 1988, p17.
97 Ibid.
98 Lerumo, n.89, p.135.
The manifesto declared that units of Umkhonto we Sizwe carried out planned attacks against government installations particularly those connected with the policy of apartheid and race discrimination. From the manifesto the following points come out clearly about Umkhonto we Sizwe -

1. It was a new, independent body formed by South Africans of all races which aimed to carry on the struggle for freedom and democracy by new methods.

2. Confronted with only two choices - submit or fight - it declared "we shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom." It is clear from this statement that they opted for non-violent resistance to deal with the government's policy of force, repression and violence.

3. By such resistance they hoped "to bring the government and its supporters to their senses" so that they changed their policies.

4. It stood for the people's defence. It was the fighting arm of the people against the policies of the government and for their rights, liberty and liberation. According to them - "in all these actions, we are working in the best interests of all the people of this country - Black, Brown and White - whose future happiness and well-being cannot be attained without the overthrow of the National government, the abolition of White supremacy and the winning of liberty, democracy and full national rights and equality for all the people of this country."

5. It fully supported the national liberation movement.

Despite the commitment to revolutionary violence, the ANC's sabotage and guerrilla attacks were designed to cause relatively little loss of life. Because the ANC leaders like Oliver Tambo were politically mature and operated in a tradition of non-violence. In commenting on this period, Fatima Meer suggested that contrary to

100 Mandela, n.81, p.122.
102 Ibid.
the White stereotypes, African political leaders were temperamentally non-violent.\textsuperscript{103} The reason for avoiding death or injury to White civilians and minimising violence was to discourage or avoid racial bitterness which jeopardises ANC's goal of a non-racial society.

In the 1970s the incidence of sabotage and guerrilla attacks rose reaching levels of sophistication in 1980s. In contrast to the 1960s, ANC guerrillas were trained as soldiers in a war of liberation, to kill both White and Black soldiers and police and other personnel connected with strategic targets. Though ANC took the responsibility for attacks on African policemen, assassination of informers, it rejected the terrorism of indiscriminate killing, assassination of White leaders, kidnapping and other measures used by extremist groups. Moreover, the attacks were so limited and scattered that Whites considered them as "little more than a low intensity nuisance that can be easily controlled."\textsuperscript{104} But the danger was that the sabotage was accompanied by mass participation. Also significant was the co-ordination of sabotage with political campaigns. This was the ANC strategy which combined political campaigns with military struggle. The ANC emphasised the importance of popular psychology and conditioning for mass participation in armed struggle. In commemorating twenty years of Unkhonto we Sizwe in December 1981, Sechaba, the ANC's official journal said "These armed operations within the country have a psychological impact. They instil self-confidence in the people and transform the latent hostility of the people to the government into open mass confrontation. They intensify the sense of unease and insecurity among enemy forces, they increase the conviction among the struggling people that victory is certain and popularise armed struggle."\textsuperscript{105} Masses were thus made to involve in such struggles.


\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Sechaba} (London), February 1982, p.7.
The changing pattern of armed struggle can be seen in various combinations and chronologies prepared by many organisations. It is difficult to obtain exact statistics as one has to depend on the press whose reporters are restricted in their movements and the reports are often incomplete. Officials on the other hand inflate the threat to minimise the damage inflicted. A UN chronology for the period from November 30, 1976 to February 12, 1982 recorded 150 incidents, but noted few of the many explosions of plastic bombs commonly used in 1976 and "pamphlet bombs" that showered urban intersections with propaganda pamphlets and flyers. A rough calculation of deaths and injuries can be made from press reports during the period of over five years covered by the UN chronology. The chronology reveals that out of 51 people who died, 13 were White police or soldiers, 10 other Whites, 17 Black police, one State witness, 8 Black guerrillas and 3 Black bystanders and of 113 injured, 8 were White police, 36 Whites, 17 Black police, 1 State witness, 17 Black guerrillas and 34 Black bystanders. The South African Defence Force compiled much lower figures. These appeared in a memorandum given to Thomas M. Callaghy in January 1983 entitled "Loss of Human Life due to ANC Activity", covering a period of five years from September 10, 1977 to January 26, 1983 for the Republic including Transkei, Ciskei and Venda. It listed incidents resulting in the deaths of 18 Africans and 4 Whites.

Women went into exile along with men. In 1955, the National Executive of the ANC highlighted the importance of the role of women in the liberation struggle, the importance of their emancipation for the achievement of true democracy and the need to mobilise them by means of special political work. At the annual national conference in December 1955, it declared "The Women's League has grown

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107 Callaghy, n.104, p.213.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
rapidly. Our women are proving themselves brave and undaunted politicians yet the women need special attention and training to assist them to become leaders of the people. The Women's League is not just an auxiliary to the African National Congress, and we know that we cannot win liberation or build a strong movement without the participation of women. We must therefore make it possible for women to play their part in the liberation movement by regarding them as equals, and helping to emancipate them in the home, even relieving them of their many family and household burdens so that women may be given an opportunity of being politically active. The men in the Congress movement must fight constantly in every possible way those outmoded customs which make women inferior and by personal example must demonstrate their belief in the equality of all human beings, of both sexes....”

After the banning of the ANC, Women's League became ANC Women’s Section. In 1981, the ANC women's section held a historic conference in Luanda. In that President Tambo stated "...women in the ANC should stop behaving as if there was no place for them above the level of certain categories of involvement. They have a duty to liberate us men from antique concepts and attitudes about the place and role of women in society and in the development and direction of our revolutionary struggle. The oppressor, has, at best, a lesser duty to liberate the oppressed than the oppressed himself. We invite the ANC women’s section, and the Black women of South Africa, more oppressed and more exploited than any section of the population, outside the kitchen, among the fighting ranks of our movement and at its command posts. The women's section is not an end in itself. It is a weapon of struggle, to be correctly used, against all forms and levels of oppression and inequality in the interests of a victorious struggle of our people.” In 1983, the head

111 Ibid, pp.61-62.
of the ANC women's section, Comrade Gertrude Shope stated - "Our main priority is the political development of our women, which will ensure their full participation in the liberation of our country."\textsuperscript{112}

These policy statements clearly illustrate that

(1) the full participation of women is needed for the victory of the liberation struggle,
(2) this will happen only as the result of special political work directed at women
(3) the ANC women's section is the force within the broader movement and therefore must spearhead the movement,
(4) the political development of women is an urgent priority, and
(5) leadership among women has to be developed by the movement.

Women did play a role in exile. According to Lindi Zulu,\textsuperscript{113} being in exile meant being away from home so, they had to raise funds for food and clothing. Secondly the education had to be taken care of. They ran even formal schools in countries like Tanzania. Otherwise informal schooling was given. The women's section played an extraordinary role in this sphere. There were many young girls who got pregnant. They even ran hospitals sponsored by organisations from abroad like Holland. The mothers and children were taken care of. Other than the political role the women had extra work to do including setting up of crèches and collecting funds. And women were encouraged to go to school. Lindi did her M.A. in journalism in Russia sponsored by the ANC.

In her personal interview Lindi Zulu explained that within the ANC women had to fight for the incorporation of their rights. She stated - "Men were sent abroad for military training and the women were left behind as it was argued that women would

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{113} Personal Interview, Lindi Zulu, Johannesburg, July 16, 1996.
fall pregnant.\textsuperscript{114} They had a family planning clinic in the camp. Women's biology did play a role of constraint. Women getting pregnant was a big problem in the military camps. Very surprisingly she narrated that when women got tired of the military camp, they would deliberately get pregnant so that they have an excuse to go back. According to her, when sending members for military training in Uganda, women were altogether excluded initially. Only men were sent. At that time they were all in the camps in Angola and had to go and re-establish themselves in Uganda. Lindi also went ultimately. She went as late as in 1990 to Uganda. Commenting on the sex discrimination within ANC Lindi Zulu remarked "Yes, men leaders dominated. Though the ANC had good policies on women on paper, in practice it was not as good. They dominated women. There was no complete trust on women's performance side. Both among women and men, there was a feeling that men performed better and thought better. It was with great difficulty that women's problems or issues were put on the agenda. The women's issues were raised and fought only by women and men had nothing to do with it."\textsuperscript{115}

It is important to critically examine the ANC's role in the freedom movement. The question of gender discrimination within ANC must be carefully examined. In fact, in terms of organisation, intensity and contribution are the liberation (armed) struggles of other African countries any less? Why did they not receive as much attention and importance?

\textbf{SOWETO UPRISINGS}

The problems of education facing Black South Africans have a long history. Africans never had a say in the planning, structuring and implementation of education. From the colonial times till 1948, there has been resistance against

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
oppressive schooling. As early as 1658, slaves at the cape rejected the form of education offered to them. Later many African chiefs spurned mission schools by withholding children. From the 1920s till the introduction of Bantu Education in the 1950s, students have adopted strikes as a form of protest.

In 1953, when the government introduced Bantu Education, teachers immediately reacted against it. In 1954, part of the 'Resist Apartheid Campaign' launched by the ANC was directed against the Bantu Education. In 1955, ANC's National Executive decided to launch an indefinite school boycott which would continue until provision could be made for students who would be out of school. This was the beginning of the African Education Movement which attempted to organise education outside of State control. As a result of its oppositional stance, this Movement faced the wrath of the State through bannings and harassment. In the 1960s students in schools and colleges continued to protest against Bantu Education through strikes and demonstrations.

In the 1970s resistance to Bantu Education took a new turn culminating in the Soweto Uprising of 1976. It is relevant to look into the background of this Uprising before analysing the events and results. An organisation called the South African Students Movement (SASM) was formed in Soweto in 1970 on the initiative of the students of three high schools. Its activities included arranging cultural events and various debates and running a mutual aid fund. Set up legally, it gave high school students an outlet for airing their grievances. SASM's focus was mainly on school affairs and on affairs related to the Bantu education system. The decision to hold a demonstration on June 16, 1976, to protest against instruction in Afrikaans was adopted at a meeting of representatives of all Soweto schools convened by the SASM branch in the township of Naledi on June 13. An action committee

consisting of two representatives from each school was formed to organise the demonstration. The SASM General Secretary Tebello Motapanyane was elected to the head the committee.

The participants gathered at a higher secondary school in Orlando West on the morning of June 16. They were around 20,000 in number. They started marching peacefully carrying placards bearing words "Down with Afrikaans", "Afrikaans - Language of Oppressors!" and "Revoke Afrikaans!", to a stadium where a rally was scheduled. Police appeared suddenly and opened fire even without warning the demonstrators to disperse. This is attested by eyewitnesses. "I did not hear the police give any order to disperse before they threw tear gas canisters into the crowd of singing school children" wrote a Rand Daily Mail reporter who was at the scene.

Asked whether the police had first fired into the air, the senior police official at Orlando police station said: "No, we fired into the crowd. It's no good firing over their heads". Justice Minister Kruger lied when he said that the police "fired in self-defence as their lives were in danger". The government appointed Cillie Commission of Enquiry (1980) reported that Bantu Education was not the cause of the uprisings but only a minor contributor to the revolt. This report alleged that "the police... found themselves in a situation of mortal danger." Thus the children who came for a peaceful protest were subjected to indiscriminate killing resulting in the death of more than 1000.

118 Frederikse, n.116, pp.155-156.
120 Rand Daily Mail (Johannesburg), June 17, 1976.
121 The Times (London), June 17, 1976.
122 Rand Daily Mail (Johannesburg), June 18, 1976.
124 The Star (Johannesburg), February 29, 1980.
125 Frederikse, n.116, p.155.
Women played an important role in this uprising. As women were primarily responsible for child-care, it was the mothers who joined the children, who went along with them, who witnessed what happened. It was a Black woman journalist, Sophie Tema, who gave the world the first eye-witness account of the initial police massacre of the children. And during the first three days and subsequent weeks while clashes continued, it was a group of women members, of the Black Women's Federation, who organised help in the most practical way possible. They went into the thick of the fighting to investigate and to help families. As they drove round the township, groups of children told them where they would find the dead and the injured. These women ventured into smoke and shooting to help other women find their children, often dead, wounded, blinded or paralysed by gunshot.

Among those identified as 'agitators' and were detained were a number of well-known figures like Winnie Mandela of ANCWL, Fatima Meer the sociologist, Joyce Seroke, of the South African YWCA; Sally Motlana, vice-president of the South African Council of Churches; Dr. Mamphela Ramphele, from a Black health clinic in the Eastern Cape; Dimza Pityana, of the South African Institute of Race Relations, and many other professional women prominent in their communities like social workers, nurses, teachers, churchwomen and journalists. One of those to suffer most was Lindiwe Sisulu, daughter of Walter Sisulu, who was held for over a year under the Terrorism Act and cruelly treated.

Mpho Thoeaebale was a 16 year old Soweto who was part of the decision to boycott classes and the planning of the march on 16 June. She saw many of her friends killed or wounded. Connie Mofokeng was yet another example. She was a member of Soweto Student Representative Council (SSRC) who later became the Secretary of Soweto Student Organisation (SOSO). She was a part of the march and was subjected to teargas while marching peacefully. She witnessed 35 deaths and was
later detained by the security police.\textsuperscript{126} The police violence prompted the students to further demonstrations against buildings and beerhalls owned by the government. They appealed to their parents to stay away from work and join in their demonstrations. Mpho herself was arrested, held incommunicado for six weeks, during which she was beaten in attempts to make her `confess' to sabotage or turn State's witness against her friends, and finally released, when she fled the country. She is one among the young people who left South Africa to carry on the struggle outside.

While Black women were in this way taking a very active part in the events of 1976, White women reacted in a different way, by forming an organisation called women for Peace. This group was convened by Mrs. Harry Oppenheimer, wife of the gold and diamond millionaire, and other White women who had been shocked and disturbed by the shooting of school children. A large number of women flocked to the first meeting, where they heard first-hand account of the massacres, such as that from Mrs. Sally Khali of a Soweto nursery crèche, who saw police shoot down eight children on the open space next to the creche. The first forms of action were deputations to government ministers, on the grounds that their aim was to create trust between women for peace and those in power. That is, to act as a buffer between the militancy of the students and the power of the State. Women for peace also prayed publicly for peace, fearing the outcome of deepening strife.

\textbf{TRADE UNION MOVEMENT}

Until 1979, South Africa had a dualistic structure of industrial relations. On the one hand there was a legalistic, formal guarantee of certain industrial rights to White, Coloured and Indian workers through the 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act. And on

the other, there was a repressive labour regime for African workers resting on the Black Labour Relations Act since 1953. It was in this context of exclusion from the formal industrial relations system that African workers organised into trade unions.

Operating within the system of apartheid, was the African trade union movement any different? To understand this, the movement has to be discussed in the context of the existing approaches. According to William Cobbett and Robin Cohen two approaches exist in the non-racial trade union movement. They are -

1. **Collective Bargaining Unionism:** It concentrates exclusively on workplace issues. And as the name suggests, 'collective bargaining' is adopted as the strategy to achieve the ends. It does not link production issues to wider political issues. The members are encouraged to become politically involved without necessarily engaging in wider political arena. The political content of such unionism, therefore, varies widely. But what is common is "an accommodation and absorption into industrial relations system, which not only institutionalises conflict but also serves to reinforce the division between economic and political forms of struggle so essential to the maintenance of capitalist relations in production, in the community and in the State." It is very clear from this statement that this unionism serves the interests of the State rather than solve the problems of the unions in the long run.

2. **Political Unionism:** Unlike the earlier one, this attempts to link production to wider political issues. It facilitates an active engagement in factory-based production politics and in community and State power issues. It engages in alliance in order to establish relationships with political organisations on a systematic basis. The union's struggles are thus linked to the wider political struggles.

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According to Eddie Webster - "A union constitutes a source of worker power in the firm, diluting managerial authority and offering members access to law through the grievance procedure." According to him, unions have two faces, each of which leads to a different view of the institution. They are -

(1) **Economic Dimension**: It is the union trying to win increases and improvements in the living conditions.

(2) **Social and Political Dimension**: It is the union actively participating in the wider social and political issues of the society.

In South Africa where the majority did not have a meaningful voice within the political system, unions inevitably began to play a central role within the political system. However, it was the decline in living standards accompanying the economic recession that brought the two faces of unionism together. It is this fusing of the economic with the political that took place after November 1984 which Eddie Webster calls as social movement unionism.

**Women in Trade Unions**

In the 1920's, African women, in theory, could belong to registered labour unions as they did not have to carry passes. African men who carried passes were excluded from any agreements reached through negotiations. Under the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, they were not even defined as 'employees'. Other restrictive labour measures included the Wage Act of 1925 which protected White workers by granting higher wages to 'White job' categories. This led to divisions within the trade union movement on the basis of race. Women workers were not exempt from such disputes but they co-operated across colour lines with common interests. This is illustrated in the Garment Workers Union in Transvaal which had a predominant female membership.

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3.55
The Garment Workers Union (GWU)

The GWU grew out of an organisation of tailoring and garment workers that was formed in 1918. At first the tailoring section dominated the union affairs. The tailors were individual craftsmen whose outlook and conditions of work were different. As the industry switched over to mass production, group activity and general conditions of work resulted, along with large intake of women employees. These women resented the tailors attitude. In 1934 the union split and a separate garment workers union was established. The majority of the women were poor White Afrikaner who migrated from the rural areas. By then 'poor White' problem had become an important political issue. The conditions of poor Whites and Africans were similar. This was seen as a direct threat to White hegemony. In 1934 Carnegie Commission concluded that White poverty was a danger and an insult to White supremacy. When the Afrikaner - dominated National Party of General Hertzog was elected to power in 1924, it introduced a range of social and economic measures designed to eradicate the problem.\textsuperscript{130} These included the reservation of certain areas of skilled and unskilled employment for White workers at skilled rates of pay, subsidised housing schemes, special education schemes and relief work.\textsuperscript{131} It was a programme of social rehabilitation which proved successful.

In its early years, the union used the existing industrial conciliation legislation against defaulting employers. It also campaigned for membership, organised street and factory meetings, demonstrations and rallies. In 1931 it challenged the employers for new wage negotiations. Over 2000 workers took part and a short term compromise with employers was reached. In 1932 the union called for another general strike undertaken by women workers. The strike was noteworthy for the discipline and solidarity of its participants inspite of rough handling by policemen. The outcome was negative. By 1935, the composition of female labour force began

\textsuperscript{130} Carnegie Commission, \textit{The Poor White Problem in South Africa}, vol.1, p.xix.
\textsuperscript{131} Walker, n.19, p.62.
to show significant changes. As the economy expanded, the demand for women in the clerical and administrative sector increased. White women moved into these posts while African women took their place on the factory floor. As many Coloured women entered the industry, in 1940 the GWU established a separate branch for 'Coloured' workers called the no.2 branch. It was organised as a parallel to the parent union which remained exclusively White. This represented a clear breach in the tradition of non-racialism within GWU. But no.2 branch heralded an increase in union activity among Coloured women workers.

In 1944 the trade union movement achieved a breakthrough with regard to the unionisation of African women. In a court case - Christina Okolo challenged the Industrial Council for the Clothing industry, Transvaal for African women's right to belong to registered unions by proving that they did not fall within the definition of 'pass-bearing' workers as laid down in the Industrial Conciliation Act. In December 1944 the court ruled in her favour. The African women became eligible for all the benefits of union membership and industrial legislation that non-African workers enjoyed. This facilitated union work among African women and held out prospects of developing a non-racial trade union, among women workers.

**Food and Canning Workers Union (FCWU)**

The FCWU was established by Ray Alexander, with encouragement from Bettie du Toit, in 1941. Alexander first started organising in the fruit-growing district of Western Cape. Conditions were uniformly bad. Work in the canning factories was seasonal, poorly paid with long and irregular hours. Slowly the union was established. FCWU was different from GWU as White women played no part in production in the food industry. Ray Alexander was elected its first general secretary. She concentrated on fighting for worker's rights and exposing the poor

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conditions under which they worked and lived. As the union pressed for improved conditions, it won support from workers in the industry. It expanded its activities to take in the fishing industry on the west coast and food processing industries in the Eastern Cape and on the Rand.

Though the membership was not exclusively female, women workers dominated in FCWU. The women played a leading role in the management of the union. In the Western Cape the FCWU was an active politicising agent among African female workers in the food industry. Under the influence of Alexander, FCWU forged close links with women's organisations and groups within the national liberation movement. For instance, several leaders of FSAW on the Cape like Abrahams, Elizabeth Mafeking and Frances Baard rose to political prominence through the union. Through the FCWU, Abrahams came into contact with a wide circle of people opposed to the political order in South Africa. She also learnt some fundamental political lessons about organisation, discipline and perseverance. She was drawn into other spheres of political work and subsequently became an executive member of both SACPO - South African Coloured Peoples Organisation and the Western Cape regional committee of the FSAW \(^{33}\). Another working-class woman who was drawn into a position of leadership within her community through the FCWU was Elizabeth Mafeking. Reflecting on this process, she commented - "I used to think that education was the only thing required to change working conditions in the factory, but today I know that it is not everything. When I was elected vice-president of the union in 1947, I said that I had no education but the workers replied that they did not want my education but they needed my leadership." \(^{34}\)

The hard-won rights, by GWU and FCWU were short lived. As apartheid became an overwhelming force with the rise to power of Nationalists in 1948 more

\(^{33}\) Walker, n.19, p.119.
\(^{34}\) Ibid.

3.58
discriminatory laws were enacted. In 1953, the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act came into effect and African women workers could no longer be members of a registered union. Separate and 'parallel' unions were formed. In 1954, the Industrial Conciliation Act excluded African women from the definition of 'employee'. Within three years of the passage of the Suppression of Communism Act of 1952, the government banned 56 trade union activists, many of them women. The general effect of these new laws were to cripple the efforts to organise Africans.

**Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWU)**

Emma Mashinini was responsible for the formation of this union. She served on the national executive of clothing industry for 12 years. As she was experienced, she was approached by people about the need for a union for African shop workers. As this job was reserved for Whites in the past, they had a union. Then, when Coloureds and Indians were employed, they too had a union. Although Africans were forbidden, the law did not stop Emma from starting a union for African shop workers. She visited their homes and told them about the union. She distributed leaflets among the workers in spite of police harassment. The employers finally came up with Liaison Committee. They said that workers should belong to this Committee instead of the union as it would deal with work conditions. Emma tracked down the members of this Committee and organised them into the union. Since these members were already recognised by workers as their representatives, it became easier. These members organised union in the workplace. This union came to be called CCAWU.

Emma was detained and kept in solitary confinement for six months. The achievements of the union were management, talking with the workers, improved workers salaries and women's rights. It was the first union in South Africa to have an agreement that protects women's maternity rights. Women were not given paid
maternity leave but they did not lose their jobs. Emma was involved in the formation of Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985.

The Domestic Workers Union (DWU)

Florence De Villiers, a domestic worker herself started the DWU with the help of Maggie Owies from the Christian Institute, who was involved in organising recreation for domestic workers. She started the union with her own savings. They opened a small office in central Cape Town. They started to talk to domestic workers about their conditions of work and life in order to organise them. The next step was to teach them to read and write. Meetings were held in the office, people's rooms and Church halls. According to Florence "we encouraged women to get involved to become organised, to see themselves as women, not as slaves." With financial help from outside, she organised DWU at a national level. They travelled and talked to domestic workers in Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban and other places. About 1700 people attended the launching of National Workers Union in Cape Town on November 29-30, 1986. Florence was eventually elected the general secretary. They drew up demands for a better wage and working conditions, nationally. The sexual harassment of domestic workers was yet another issue which they took up. They resolved to get involved politically. Therefore NDWU was affiliated to COSATU.

Like in the political organisations, sexism was present even in the unions. Lydia Kempe explains this aspect from her experience as a trade union organiser. In 1977 she became the only female organiser among six men in the Metal and Allied Worker's Union. At first it was difficult as she felt intimidated. As women are seen as inferior to men in South African tradition, it took some time for her to get over the

135 Russel, n.126, p.187.
136 Ibid, p.175.
inferiority complex. Though she did the same work as men, everyday during the lunch time the men collected their money and dumped it on her desk saying "you are the woman. You can choose better food at better value than we can." She resisted and made everybody share the work. She further said that it was very difficult for a woman to organise men. Some of them said to her "If you don't make love with us we are not joining your union". Thus, it was difficult for women organisers to win respect and support from men. Nevertheless, Lydia became an organiser for the Transport and General Workers Union. She started this union in Johannesburg and became the head of the Transvaal region. She negotiated for higher wages, holiday allowances and the right to participate in stay-aways. In 1982, she started organising women cleaners who were a neglected group. These women who work in the night shifts were subjected to sexual harassment by men supervisors. The union raised this issue with the management and replaced men supervisors with women. Moreover the night workers had no facilities and no rest. The union succeeded in providing facilities to sleep, to heat food and also reduce their working hours.

Trade unions played a significant role in directing the course of the women's movement. The importance of the unions lie in the fact that they dealt with the working women who were excluded from political organisations. This movement acted as a training ground for those women who rose to leadership positions within their union and were drawn into a wider political involvement.

WOMEN IN PRISONS

Women's resistance to apartheid was met with arrests and detentions. Detention without trial became legal in South Africa in 1963. There are four types of detentions

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138 Ibid, p.194.
- state of emergency regulations, security legislations (Section 28, 29, 31 and 50 of the Internal Security Act), awaiting trial and convicted. Under the State of Emergency, in 1986 it is estimated that 25,000 people were detained of which 3050 were women. Section 28 of the Internal security Act provides for indefinite "preventative" detention and is used to remove political opponents from the community for lengthy periods. Only 8 people were held under this section in 1985. Section 29 of the Act allows for the indefinite detention of a person in solitary confinement with no access to legal counsel, family visits and contact with other detainees. This is used to hold people in detention for the purpose of interrogation. More than half of the detentions under the security legislation have occurred under this section. Women had on an average made up 8 percent of known persons detained. Section 31 of the Act provides for the detention of potential state witnesses. In 1986 out of 709 detained under this section only 13 people were known. Five among them were women. Section 50 of the Act provides for short-term (upto 14 days) "preventative" detentions. In 1986 out of 3500 persons detained 500 were women. All the above data is collected from the files of Detainees Parents Support Committee (DPSE).\textsuperscript{139}

The problems that all detainees and convicted prisoners experienced in detention varied from prison to prison and the nature of their detention. The common problems relate to the living conditions. The National Medical and Dental Association (NAMDA) which provides basic medical and psychological care for ex-detainees reported that "cramped cells, unhygienic environment and inadequate food of poor quality are common complaints for all detainees."\textsuperscript{140} Complaints of lower abdominal pain, dizzy spells, back and neckaches and anxiety and depression are reported upon release. While many of these problems are experienced by all the detainees, women faced problems particular to them. According to Elaine Mohamed, the way

\textsuperscript{139} A Woman's Place is in the Struggle, Not Behind Bars! (Johannesburg, n.d), pp.21-24.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid. p.9.
women experienced detentions is totally different from the way men do. She said, she burst into tears when a security policeman told her "I really enjoy interrogating women. I can get things out of them and do things to them that I can't do to the men."141

**Specific Conditions Reported By Women**

**Physical Torture**

African, Indian and Coloured were subjected more to physical torture than White women. Physical torture included beating, kicking, whipping, electric shocks, making them stand for hours without food and sleep, drugging, poisoning, and other methods. Shanthie Naidoo who was forced to stand for five days and nights while being questioned said "towards the end of interrogation I had terrifying hallucinations, like nightmares in which the questions became all mixed up with broken dreams."142 Connie Mofokeing detained for participating in Soweto Uprising was severely tortured. She elaborates - "They gave me electric shocks on my bosom and my back. It was like a burn. They beat me with a baton and threw me against the walls. For about six days I was given no food, not allowed to change clothes. They continued torturing me this way for six months. They put me in a cold bath before assaulting me with my clothes on. But, for electric torture they undressed me. It is hard to know which kind of torture was more painful. I had become a thing. At one stage I even thought I was dead."143

**Sexual Harassment**

It is difficult to assess the extent of sexual harassment in prisons as women are afraid to talk about these assaults. The following statements reveal the way women were subjected to both physical and psychological harassment. According to Connie Mofokeing "One day the policeman wanted to sleep with me. They would usually try

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141 Russel, n.126, p.37.
142 Personal interview, Shanthie Naidoo, Johannesburg, July 15, 1996.
143 Russell, n.126, p.51.
to sleep with me when they came to look into my cell in the evenings. I often couldn't sleep because I felt so unsafe."\(^\text{144}\) Zubeida Jaffer, a journalist testified in the Truth Commission hearings saying that Captain Du Plessis ordered a policeman to rape me by saying "she is just a mattress, lie on her."\(^\text{145}\) Shahieda Issel was subjected to psychological torture. She explained that ten men continuously asked her personal questions about her love life which was very embarrassing. Further, Colonel Mostert wanted to know the colour of her panties. When she answered he further asked what was inside. When she refused to answer he said "Well, if you wont tell me, I'll find out myself."\(^\text{146}\) She was afraid that she would be raped. Elaine Mohamed illustrates the body searches in prison - "I remember policewomen making me strip in front of men. When they did not strip they would slip hands into my undergarments which i found much more traumatic than stripping."\(^\text{147}\)

**Pregnancy**

The issue of pregnancy for women in detention is a serious one. They have to carry their pregnancies under intolerable conditions. Women have been beaten and tortured while they are already in poor health resulting from pregnancy without adequate care, food, medical attention and exercise. They give birth under prison conditions. For many, it is their first experience of child birth and they cope alone without the support and comfort of family. A common experience for women who are detained while pregnant is miscarriage. It is either imposed upon or results from assault, torture, lack of medical care and stress. Colin De Souza, confessed in TRC hearings in Cape Town that during detention his girl friend who was pregnant was forcefully given abortion pills.\(^\text{148}\) DPSC reported that a 27 year old woman, 4 months pregnant was stripped naked to waist and assaulted while a wet sack was placed over head and an eighteen year old, five month pregnant, was teargassed in

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\(^\text{144}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{145}\) Zubeida Jaffer, complaint to Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Case no: CT/00776.
\(^\text{146}\) Russell, n.126, pp.71-74.
\(^\text{147}\) Ibid. p.39.
\(^\text{148}\) Colin De Souza, TRC public hearings (TRCPH), University of Western Cape (UWC), Cape Town, August 5, 1996.
her cell. The security police often exploited pregnancy to extract information about women. In December 1985, Zubeida Jaffer was arrested when she was pregnant. They wanted to know from her about the women making ANC flags. The security person said that he prepared a chemical to make her drink and kill the baby. She further explained "they gave me option either to give information and have baby or not give information and lose the baby and I chose the latter. I didn't want my baby to come into this world in such circumstances. It would be a burden to her." She was not given the chemical ultimately. Shirley Gunn, a White woman also went through painful experiences both during her pregnancy and after child birth. As she was accused of a bomb explosion on August 31, 1988 she was on the death roll. She went underground as she was eight months pregnant and gave birth there. She was captured by police when her infant was sixteen months old. She was booked under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act and subjected to torture as her child was removed from her. As she raised the child underground she was the only person he knew. Moreover she was breast-feeding him. According to her "they had no moral right to remove my child from me but they had the arrest warrant for my sixteen month old child." She went on a hunger strike to get him back. She further explained that in his absence they brought a tape with his voice crying. Apart from such psychological torture, when the child fell sick she was not offered immediate medical help.

All these women displayed immense strength. But they all suffered from the after effects of torture. They suffered from anxiety, depression and related mental and psychological problems. Both Zubeida Jaffer and Shirley Gunn admitted that they developed post-traumatic stress syndrome which no longer allows them to function like normal individuals. Elane Mohamed started hallucinating to combat loneliness. During her trial when asked what she was doing she replied that she

\[149\] A Woman's Place..., n. 139, p. 10.
\[150\] Zubeida Jaffer, TRCPH, UWC, Cape Town, August 7, 1996.
\[151\] Shirley Gunn, TRCPH, UWC, Cape Town, August 7, 1996.
\[152\] Ibid
was stroking her tail while literally doing it. She said that she had conceptualised herself as a squirrel. Finally Connie Mofokeng explained that "after the torture my periods stopped as there was a blockage in my fallopian tube because I had been kicked there. I couldn't hear with my right ear because of constant beating. The electric torture made it very painful for me to wear a blouse."\footnote{Russell, n.126, p.51.}

It is important to note that racism existed in the prisons. The treatment and torture varied with races. Whites were given more comforts, better food and were less tortured with few exceptions like Shirley Gunn. On the other hand, African women were badly assaulted and humiliated. In her interview Sheila Weinburg said that there were separate death cells for Whites and Africans. White death cells were luxurious with wooden floors and windows while Black death cells were narrow, dark and without any ventilation.\footnote{Personal interview, Sheila Weinburg, Johannesburg, July 14, 1996.} Elaine Mohamed was arrested in August 1991 under section 6 of the Terrorism Act along with two other White men with whom she worked. In the prison she was given ten days of hard labour while the guys were allowed to read and sit around. The security people said to her "These guys are White. They will get peanut butter and blankets but as you are a Black you wont get anything."\footnote{Russell, n.126, p.35.} It was a tactic to try and divide them as they did not want Africans and Whites to work together. Mary Burton who spent a few days in police cell noted "I was given a blanket and a mattress while African women slept on the floor. It was awful to enjoy the privileges on the basis of race even in the prison."\footnote{Personal interview, Mary Burton, Cape Town, August 5, 1996.} Fatima Meer explained that they had two kinds of diet in prison - European and African. White women were given superior treatment compared to non-Whites who are Africans, Indians and Coloured.\footnote{Personal interview, Fatima Meer, Durban, August 21, 1996.} Shanthie Naidoo, however felt that Indians were treated slightly better than the Africans. She said "they served different food for different
races. Though Indians were categorised as Blacks we got better food and facilities."158

Thus in prison women were tortured physically, psychologically and sexually. Through detentions the government aimed to remove political opposition, not criminals. The goal was to frighten people into believing that it was too dangerous to oppose apartheid. But according to Andrey Coleman "because of detentions those who were not politically active often joined the struggle"159. The detentions made women stronger and determined. However the statistics of women detained indicates that women are under represented in resistance against apartheid. Nevertheless, their role cannot be undermined.

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158 Personal interview, Shanthie Naidoo, Johannesburg, July 15, 1996.
159 Russel, n.126, p.29.