

An unlikely union. Exploring the possibilities of Afrikaner and black women's organisations cooperating in the Women's National Coalition, 1991-1994

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Abstract

Die Women's National Coalition (WNC) is in 1992 gestig om gelykberegting vir vroue in demokratiese Suid-Afrika te verseker. Inligting oor vroue se behoeftes en aspirasies sou ingesamel word en in 'n Vrouehandves saamgevat word wat uiteindelik deel van die nuwe grondwet sou word. Op hierdie wyse sou vroueregte grondwetlik beskerm word. Die WNC was 'n African National Congress Women's League inisiatief. Vroueorganisasies dwarsoor die land is uitgenooi om die politieke arena te betree. Die gevolg was dat ongeveer 100 organisasies by die WNC aangesluit het, van hulle was ongeveer dertien Afrikanervroueorganisasies. Die grootste groepering was Afrikanervroue-kultuurorganisasies.

Die verteenwoordigers van die Afrikanerkultuurorganisasies het moeilik by die WNC aangepas. Daar was talle praktiese probleme, maar dit was veral haar gebrek aan politieke vernuf, en die vyandigheid van swart vroue wat die vergaderings van die WNC domineer het, wat haar betrokkenheid in die wiele gery het. Die gedagte het ook by feitlik al die Afrikanervroue ontstaan dat die WNC 'n politieke rookskerm was vir die ANC om sy magsbasis te versterk.

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die moontlikheid of daar wel samewerking tussen Afrikanervroue en swartvroue in die WNC kon wees. Moontlike raakpunte, soos moederskap, patriargie, godsdiens, feminisme, susterskap, ens. word ondersoek. Die slotsom is dat daar nie werklike raakpunte tussen Afrikanervroue en swartvroue in die WNC was nie.

Keywords: Women's National Coalition; African National Congress; Women's League; Patriarchy; Religion; Feminism; Sisterhood; Motherhood; Mother-centred; Afrikaner women's organisations.

Introduction

In September 1991 the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) issued an invitation to women's organisations to enter the political arena in order to ensure equal rights for women in an imminently democratic South Africa. The driving force for this action was that there was concern amongst these women at the time that there was a real possibility that women could be excluded from the political processes that would determine the future of South Africa. The Women's National Coalition (WNC) was officially founded in 1992. The aim of this organisation was to gather information on women's needs and aspirations, and to unify women in formulating and adopting a Women's Charter that would become an integral part of the new South African constitution.¹

About 100 organisations joined the Women's National Coalition (WNC), including about thirteen Afrikaner women's organisations,² as well as political parties. The Afrikaner women's organisations that had the promotion of Afrikaner culture as their main aim were the Afrikaanse Taalen Kultuurvereniging (ATKV), Dames Aktueel, Jong Dames Dinamiek and Dameskring. The welfare organisation Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie (SAVF) also had the protection of cultural heritage as one of its aims. The SA Women's Agricultural Union, who promoted the development and education of women, was a predominantly Afrikaner organisation. Kontak and Women for South Africa were communication-orientated organisations with a majority of Afrikaner women as members. There were also Afrikaner women in the Women's Bureau of South Africa. The Women's Outreach Foundation was a National Party initiative. The National Party Vroueaksie and the Democratic Party's Women's Forum were members of the WNC and were also represented by both Afrikaner and English women.

A host of literature has been published on the WNC. Most heralded the success of the organisation in achieving its objectives of mobilising women's organisations and producing the Charter.³ Phrases like "WNC ... successfully mobilizes thousands of women to demand equal rights" and "such a show of

1 Mayibuye Centre, University of Western Cape, Catalogue 22, The Papers of the Women's National Coalition (MCH 100) 1.1, The Constitution of the WNC, 6 February 1993.

2 See Addendum for list of women's organisations.

3 L Maritz, "Afrikanervroue se politieke betrokkenheid in historiese perspektief met spesiale verwysing na die Women's National Coalition van 1991 tot 1994" (D.Phil, University of Stellenbosch, 2004), pp. viii-xii.

political unity was unprecedented in the history of South Africa”⁴ and “the WNC represented a peak in the expression of women’s collective power”⁵ abound and suggest that women were indeed united towards achieving a common goal.

Although most research acknowledges that the diversity of women in the WNC was problematic, the suggestion has been that this was dealt with satisfactorily. In the conveners’ report of February 1994 co-conveners Frene Ginwala and Ann Letsebe admitted that there were many tensions and anxieties both within its leadership structure and participating organisations as well as within regions. They suggested that this was quite common in the formative stages of organisations.⁶ According to Sheila Meintjies:⁷

The WNC approached the matter of diversity with sensitivity. Whilst recognising women shared subordination and oppression, their experiences in every-day life differed according to their material circumstances. Middle-class women and working-class women, black and white, Christian, Hindu, Islamic women saw and experienced life very differently. This recognition of difference was what in fact made possible the coalition of women across such a broad ideological and political range.

The reality was very different. Most Afrikaner women in the WNC felt none or very little of the suggested sensitivity and acceptance – sentiments that they in most cases also did not return.

When I was presented with the papers in 1995 of the WNC⁸ as a research topic for a doctoral dissertation, it soon became evident that although Afrikaner women’s organisations were in theory members of the WNC, their representatives were largely uninvolved. Archival research – but more importantly correspondence, interviews, questionnaires and discussions with Afrikaner women who represented their organisations on the WNC – revealed a sobering picture of a group of women who represented a large number of women, but were marginalised.⁹

4 J Cock and A Bernstein, “Gender differences: Struggles around ‘needs’ and ‘rights’ in South Africa”, *NWSA Journal*, 13(3), pp. 138-139.

5 S Hassim and A Gouws, “Redefining the public space: Women’s organisations, gender consciousness and civil society in South Africa”, *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 1998, 25(2), p. 53.

6 MCH 100 14.3.13.3.2, National Conference on women, reports, convenor’s report to the National Conference, 25-27 February 1994.

7 S Meintjies, “The women’s struggle for equality during South Africa’s transition to democracy”, *Transformation*, 30, 1996, p. 59.

8 MCH 100, The Papers of the Women’s National Coalition.

9 L Maritz, “Afrikanervrou se politieke betrokkenheid in historiese perspektief...”, pp. 217-220.

This article focuses on the Afrikaner women in the cultural organisations¹⁰ that “officially” joined the WNC. These organisations are important because they were organised nationwide, and had many branches and large memberships.¹¹ ATKV-Dames alone claimed that they had 32 000 members.¹² Other membership numbers that are available include: Dames Aktueel had 2 380 members and 204 branches in 1992, and Dames Aktueel had 1 500 members in 1987.¹³ A positive and active participation of representatives on a national and regional level in the WNC would have had the potential to make thousands of Afrikaner women politically aware and to prepare them for the future in a democratic South Africa.

This article explores the possibilities of cooperation between these Afrikaner women and black women in the WNC. Would it have been possible in 1991, so soon after the dismantling of apartheid, for Afrikaner women to adapt to the WNC? Would it be possible for them to work with black women? Would it be possible for black women to accept Afrikaner cultural organisations? It is necessary, however, to look at the events that led up to the establishment of the WNC by the ANCWL. Afrikaner women’s experience in the WNC will also be discussed briefly.

The ANC women and the road to the WNC

Although the ANC had long recognised that women must be mobilised for national liberation, the emancipation of women after liberation did not receive much attention. For the ANC in exile it was through the efforts of the Women Section and the support of President Oliver Tambo that several women were given opportunities within the ANC. In 1987 the ANC formed the Commission for the Emancipation of Women, albeit with a man, Oliver Tambo, at the head.¹⁴

10 For the purpose of this research, Afrikaans cultural organisations are understood to have as their aims: the promotion of the Afrikaans language and culture and/or the promotion of Christian values. See K Menell and M Jobson, *Women’s rights in South Africa, a guide to national organisations with a gender focus* (Pretoria, HSRC, 1995), Chapter 8.

11 L Maritz, “Afrikanervroue se politieke betrokkenheid in historiese perspektief ...”, Chapter 3.

12 E-mail: E Jordaan (ATKV-Dames)/L Maritz (Researcher), 30 March 2001.

13 M Pretorius, “Waar kom die dameskring vandaan? 1967-1998”, abbreviated by Dioné Prinsloo, updated by Riette van der Merwe, June 1998, n.p.; Dames Aktueel, *Feesalbum 1978-2003, 25 years, s.a.*, p. 12.

14 ANC Women’s League, *The ANC Women’s League: Contributing to a democratic, non-racist and non-sexist South Africa* (Johannesburg, ANCWL, 1993), p. 4.

In 1987, during the ANC Women's Section's second national conference in Kabwe, Zambia, women agreed on the need for an umbrella women's organisation for black liberation. The idea of a Women's Charter was also mentioned.¹⁵ At the Malibongwe conference in January 1990 women's activists from inside the country met those in exile. The need for a "strong organisation and structures through which the triple oppression of women can be addressed" was expressed.¹⁶

When the ANCWL was re-established in August 1990, the need for a national alliance of women's organisations was reiterated.

But the women from the ANCWL quickly became disillusioned. The first blow was during the ANC's national conference in July 1991, when their demand that 30% of all elected positions in the ANC must be filled with women was rejected. The second blow was that all women in South Africa had to face the reality that when the negotiations started for CODESA all parties included only men in their negotiating teams. The ANCWL realised that for the women's voice to be heard an alliance of women's organisations across all sectors had to be established. This led to the invitation of the ANCWL to all women's organisations that would result in the establishment of the WNC.¹⁷

Although it was known that the WNC had close links to the ANCWL, the claim was that it was controlled by the League.¹⁸ The reality was that the ANCWL played a pivotal, if not hegemonic, role. Hassim states that the Women's National Coalition was driven by women within the ANC and could command the support of the ANC at crucial moments.¹⁹ At the first meeting stalwarts such as Getrude Shope, then president of the ANCWL, Baleka Kgotsile, secretary of the ANCWL, and Frene Ginwala, deputy of the ANC National Commission for the Emancipation of Women, took centre stage.²⁰ The first Steering Committee consisted of Frene Ginwala as convenor and Ann Letsebe as co-convenor. The National Secretary General

15 SK Abrams, *Fighting for women's liberation during the liberation of South Africa: The Women's National Coalition* (MA, Wadham College, Oxford, 2000), pp. 15-16 (Note: Abrams's chronology of events is incorrect).

16 Malibongwe Conference: Programme of Action, 13-18 January 1990 (available at <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=7132>, as accessed on 21 May 2014).

17 S Hassim, "A conspiracy of women: The women's movement in South Africa's transition to democracy", *Social Research*, 69(3), fall 2002, pp. 696, 700-701.

18 G Waylen, "Women's mobilization and gender outcomes in transitions to democracy. The case of South Africa", *Comparative Political Studies*, 40 (5), May 2007, p. 530.

19 S Hassim, *Women's organizations and democracy in South Africa: Contesting authority* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 147.

20 Personal collection: Minutes of the meeting called by the ANCWL to discuss campaign for a women's charter, Johannesburg 27 September 1991.

was Thoko Msane.²¹ Gertrude Shope was at a later stage co-convenor. Jenny Malan, president of *Vroue vir Suid-Afrika*, member of KONTAK and former organiser of the National Party, felt from the beginning that the WNC was only a smokescreen to get the women's vote and that the ANC had control from the beginning and never let go.²²

This invitation from the politically experienced women from the ANCWL who were in exile and those who had to endure the liberation struggle inside South Africa caught most Afrikaner women off guard.

The experience of Afrikaner women in the WNC

“The WNC was a political coalition,” says Amanda Botha.²³ At the beginning of the 1990s Afrikaner women were not politically engaged. Some of the most important reasons for this were the Afrikaners' religion and a patriarchal ideology that preferred women in subordinate positions. Afrikaner women also had no sense of the need for political responsibility and, especially after 1940, they were encouraged to play the roles of mother and housewife, and to leave the exercise of political power to the men.²⁴ These were also women who had the leisure time to join cultural organisations. The consequence of this was that most Afrikaner women were not prepared for what awaited them in a political coalition such as the WNC.

It has been argued that in the early 1990s Afrikaner women were experiencing an identity crisis. As apartheid was being dismantled and discredited, even by the Afrikaner churches, there were growing doubts among the women about their religious values as well as the prospect of a black government; too few traditional values remained in place to anchor their sense of self.²⁵

21 After the 1994 election nine of the Steering Committee members represented the ANC as members of parliament.

22 L Maritz (Personal Collection), interview, J Malan (*Vroue vir Suid-Afrika* and *Kontak*), 5 March 2006.

23 L Maritz (Personal Collection), interview, A Botha (representative for *Kaapse Vroueklub*), 18 March 1996. Botha was one of the few Afrikaner women who adapted comfortably within the WNC.

24 L Maritz, “KODESA? Is dit 'n nuwe kopseerpil?’ ’n Ondersoek na die Afrikanervrou se politieke ingesteldheid in die 20ste eeu”, *LitNet Akademies*, 9(1), 3 December 2012 (available at <http://www.litnet.co.za/Article/kodesa-is-dit-n-nuwe-kopseerpil-n-ondersoek-na-die-afrikanervrou-se-politieke>, as accessed on 1 June 2014).

25 L Maritz, “KODESA? Is dit 'n nuwe kopseerpil?...”, *LitNet Akademies*, 9(1), 3 December 2012.

It is thus ironic that in 1989 Frene Ginwala²⁶ made the following appeal to Afrikaner women: “From what we know of the history of our country, there is more to your culture than an exclusive inward focus and a rejection of the rest of South Africa ... Retrieve the best of Afrikaans culture – it is rich and the common heritage of all South Africans; you fought against injustice, colonialism and imperialism”.²⁷ These words may have been political rhetoric, but they represented a conciliatory gesture directed towards Afrikaner women. Yet in spite of Ginwala’s positive view of Afrikaner culture, Afrikaner women were not prepared to defend it themselves.

Many of the Afrikaner women who approached the WNC would have done so with great uncertainty, not only about the future of whites in South Africa, or about their own identity, but especially about the reception they could expect within the WNC. Jenny Malan, a seasoned public figure, said that at the first meeting she felt uneasy and self-conscious, since she recognised no one from the “traditional sector” to mingle with; that it was strange to be “in the enemy’s kraal” without any allies. Malan also found the ANC dominance intimidating, where most organisations sent one representative, but the ANC had more than 10 representatives.²⁸ A negative response could have been expected from the vast majority of black women. A study on intolerance in South Africa found that, apart from the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging and the Inkatha Freedom Party, the Afrikaner was the most hated group in South Africa. This opinion survey was conducted in 1996 and this feeling was presumably even more intense in 1991. The same study mentions that “a lingering ‘apartheid memory’ continues to restrict the development of trust and allegiance”.²⁹ This mistrust was present among black as well as Afrikaner women.

Afrikaner women experienced hostility in the WNC. Rhoda Kadalie, activist and academic, said that, “despite their best intentions, Afrikaner women – as far as the black women were concerned – always said the wrong thing, or said it in the wrong way, and consequently evoked negative and hostile reactions”.

26 Frene Ginwala was at that stage deputy head of the ANC’s National Commission for the emancipation of women. She was elected convener of the WNC in April 1992.

27 R Scheffer, “Women take up the challenge”, *Democracy in Action*, April 1989, p. 11.

28 J Malan, correspondence, re. first meeting of WNC on 25 April 1992; Jenny Malan, notes re. ANCWL-meeting on 27 September 1991.

29 JL Gibson and A Gouws, *Overcoming intolerance in South Africa* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003), pp. 43, 50 and 53. According to Gouws, the findings are based on a sample of over 3 000 people, who consisted of all four race groups and ten ethnic groups. The methodology required respondents to indicate which groups they liked least (“least like” methodology).

According to Kadalie, the behaviour of black women towards the Afrikaner women was “rude”. Even during the meetings held abroad, the ANC women already felt that they had the moral high ground over the Afrikaner women, who were the oppressors. Questions by Afrikaner women were met with a “shut them up” attitude. The result was they rather remained silent. This was also the situation in the WNC. According to Kadalie, the ANC’s style was domineering and in meetings they were authoritarian and manipulative. In response to a question as to why the convenors did not ensure that everyone should be accommodated, her view was that Frene Ginwala would do nothing that would weaken the ANC’s position.³⁰ But this was poor meeting discipline and led to one group, the Afrikaner women, feeling that they were being ignored. Such actions reflect negatively on an organisation such as the WNC, which was specifically advocating the equal treatment of women, but did not apply this principle among its own members. The leaders of the WNC should have acknowledged diversity and not allowed one group to dominate or let one group feel excluded.

Apart from the hostility towards Afrikaner women noted above, there were various practical considerations, such as inconvenient meeting venues and times, and cultural differences such as the loud and boisterous behaviour of black women that also hampered the attempt to adapt. There was thus intolerance on both sides: for the black women their oppression was still too fresh in their memories, and for the Afrikaner women it was especially the unfriendly reception, which in turn meant that they focused on differences and irritations. The Afrikaner women’s experience of the WNC was predominantly negative.³¹

Possibilities of cooperation

Were their possible points of contact between the Afrikaner women and the black women? What would have motivated Afrikaner women to stay with the WNC and try to overlook and adjust to it. Mamphele Ramphele, political activist, medical doctor and academic, said in 1990 that it is much easier for an African to interact with an Afrikaner than with an English-speaking white

30 L Maritz (Personal Collection), interview, R Kadalie (*Women’s Alliance*), 11 June 2004.

31 L Maritz, “‘In die vyand se kraal’. Die rol en ervaring van Afrikanervroue in die Women’s National Coalition”, *LitNet Akademies*, 7(3), Desember 2010 (available at <http://www.litnet.co.za/Article/in-die-vyand-se-kraal-die-rol-en-ervaring-van-afrikanervroue-in-die-womens-national>, as accessed on 3 June 2014).

person. She said that English speakers were more “proper” and caught up in their own class, which served as a kind of protective cocoon.³² Although there has been no study on the way English-speaking women adapted to the WNC, Ramphele’s assumption about Afrikaner women and Africans in the WNC has proved to be wrong. In the politically charged atmosphere the opposite was in fact the case.

Yet Kadalie believes that points of contact were possible, especially around common and shared factors such as women as mothers, patriarchy and religion.

As mothers

Women should have much in common as mothers. Where motherhood would indicate the private and personal concern with their own families, motherism would indicate a collective response from women as a result of their identities as mothers.³³ Motherism³⁴ would expect that all women would be linked, if not united, around women’s issues. This would essentially be an “ethic of care” linked to children and other close relationships.³⁵ Nevertheless, there were many obstacles to the development of a mother-centred sense of community. In Harare, early in March 1989, Gertrude Shope, member of the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC, said to the white women: “We may differ on some points, but we are all mothers of that country and it is our duty to salvage it from its problems”.³⁶ Shope refers to the women as “mothers of the nation”, but it is doubtful whether the Afrikaner women were prepared to share a joint vision of South Africa with black women.

During the state of emergency in the 1980s Albertina Sisulu, anti-apartheid activist, pleaded with white mothers: “Our children are dying in the townships, killed by your children. You are mothers. Why do you allow your children to go to train for the army?”³⁷ It is doubtful whether black women realised that it was virtually impossible even for white Afrikaners to oppose the government

32 M Ramphele, “As Afrikaner- en Afrika-vroue saamkom ...”, *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, November 1990, pp. 36-37.

33 N Gasa, *Women in South African history: They remove boulders and cross rivers* (HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2007), p. 267.

34 It is argued that motherism is an African form of feminism; this argument is not explored in this article.

35 S Hassim and A Gouws, “Redefining the public space ...”, *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 1998, 25(2), p. 65.

36 R Scheffer, “Women take up the challenge”, *Democracy in action*, April 1989, p. 10.

37 F Fouche, “Overcoming the sisterhood myth”, *Transformation*, 1994, 23, p. 81.

when compulsory military service was introduced.

During an ANC congress in Luanda, Angola, in 1981 Oliver Tambo expressed his opinion on the presence of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in the south of Angola as follows:

Which one represents man as having travelled the least possible distance from the mediaeval ape, which killed and murdered with insatiable relish? Is it those in Luanda who are discussing the role of women in the development of human society and the upbringing of children, or is it those in southern Angola who are savagely bombing women and children, destroying houses, towns, bridges?

He added:³⁸

Far from the racist regime being subjected to a so-called communist onslaught, it is the peace-seeking nations of southern Africa who are the targets of a total onslaught by a minority who came to Africa as foreigners ... these racists ... are murdering, pillaging and plundering their way northward still.

This view of the army as murderers and plunderers was heard by ANC women abroad and experienced daily by black women in South Africa. White mothers in South Africa seemed to have accepted the status quo and did not question it – for young men military service was seen as the necessary transition from boyhood to adulthood. In late 1987 and in 1988, with the number of deaths escalating, the situation changed and there is evidence of two Afrikaner mothers who wrote in the *Fair Lady* about their pain and confusion after their sons died fighting in a foreign country and not while doing border service as citizens were led to believe.³⁹ Afrikaner women could possibly have explained by 1991 that it was very difficult for them to send their sons to war, but it is also doubtful whether Afrikaner women could have acknowledged those same sons as murderous terrorists.

Julia Wells has argued that motherhood could bring together women from less economically advantaged communities with mothers from more privileged communities. In her words: “Motherist appeals have proven successful in drawing white women, churches, donor agencies ... and high-profile political leaders into community struggles”. She believes that motherhood can transcend political and economic hostility. Wells contends

38 OR Tambo, Speech at the conclusion of the conference of the Women’s Section of the ANC, Luanda, Angola, 14 September 1981 (available at <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4392>, as accessed on 23 October 2013).

39 MJ Phillips, “The end conscription campaign, 1983-1988: A study of white extra-parliamentary opposition to apartheid” (MA, Unisa, 2002), pp. 18, 166, 169-173.

that motherhood should be seen as the first phase of political development. For this to happen it is necessary that organisations with strong mother-centric values should be mobilised.⁴⁰ The WNC's focus, however, was political and not mother-centric. The ANC leaders who had insisted in 1989 on motherhood as a unifying factor were now in the race for political appointments. Hassim and Gouws concluded that motherism "may not be enough to sustain a political identity and solidarity among women".⁴¹

Patriarchy

Was it not possible for black women and Afrikaner women to find common ground on the issue of patriarchy? In the words of Albie Sachs, "one of the few non-racial institutions in South Africa is patriarchy ... it rears itself with special and equal vigour in all societies".⁴² In the opening address to the WNC Frene Ginwala said: "We are all part of a very patriarchal society".⁴³ "But the patriarchal oppression of black women and white women is very different".

Although black women, according to Fidela Fouche, were in general poor since they were economically exploited and racially discriminated against, they were seen as strong and did not need the protection of men.⁴⁴ Conversely patriarchy empowered some black women within patriarchal structures. Even through black women in South Africa could move only within the boundaries set by black men, they managed to grow politically and become aware of their own value, despite the limitations and constraints of patriarchy.⁴⁵ Deborah Posel has argued that black women redefined patriarchy. As a result of urbanisation, and the low wages, unemployment and arrests of black men, black women were compelled to take on ever more responsibilities. Increasingly black women replaced men as the heads of households, but all the duties and tasks she had to perform to keep the family together were represented and defended as extensions of her role as mother. In other words, all this happened within the discourse of patriarchy, but the social contract

40 JC Wells, *The rise and fall of motherism as a force in black women's resistance movements* (Paper, Conference on women and gender in Southern Africa, University of Natal, 1991), pp. 28-30.

41 S Hassim and A Gouws, "Redefining the public space ...", *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 1998, 25(2), p. 72.

42 A Sachs, *Protecting human rights in a new South Africa* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1990), p. 53.

43 MCH 100, 15.1.5.6 Workshops (National): Speech by Frene Ginwala, National Workshop, April 25-26, 1992.

44 F Fouche, "Overcoming the sisterhood myth", *Sash*, January 1994, p. 7.

45 S Hassim, "A conspiracy of women'...", *Social research*, 69(3), fall 2002, pp. 696-697.

of patriarchy was renegotiated.⁴⁶ These were the women who became the members of the WNC.

On the other hand, white middle-class Afrikaner women were comfortably cushioned within patriarchy. In the hands of the “protective paternalistic gentleman”, patriarchy left Afrikaner women dependent and comfortable but uncertain.⁴⁷ Although it can be argued that patriarchy disempowered Afrikaner women, there is also the idea that Afrikaner women were really as more like the women described by the Indian activist Sarojini Naidu in the 1920s: “Much of this so-called oppression is simply imagined by women. She can be as free as she wants to be! I tie my dog up with a bit of rope and he sits there looking at me whining, because he is tied up”.⁴⁸ The Afrikaner woman’s apparently resigned acceptance of her role is linked to an absence of feminist convictions. Amanda Gouws has highlighted the point that it is difficult for Afrikaner women to be outspoken on gender issues, especially in the home, because “No woman wants to do battle every day with the people she loves”.⁴⁹

Patriarchy was therefore also not a point of contact in the WNC, because the nature of patriarchy differed radically in the experience of black women and white women.

Religion

Religion has also been mentioned as a potential point of contact between Afrikaner and black women. Statistics show that almost 80% of South Africans are Christians, so this was a possibility.⁵⁰ One of the purposes of most Afrikaner women’s organisations is acknowledgement of their Christian faith, and meetings almost always open with a reading from Scripture and a prayer. According to Estelle Jordaan, representative for ATKV-Dames, “At the WNC meetings Christian views were not necessarily negated, but avoided”.⁵¹ In the first place, most WNC meetings were held on a Sunday afternoon. Even though urbanised Afrikaners do not always preserve the sanctity of the

46 D Posel, *Women’s powers, men’s authority: Rethinking patriarchy* (Paper, Conference on women and gender in Southern Africa, 1991, University of Natal, Durban), pp. 22-23.

47 L Maritz, “KODESA? Is dit ’n nuwe kopseerpil? ...”, *LitNet Akademies*, 9(1), 3 December 2012.

48 ME Rothman, *My beskeie deel, ’n outobiografiese vertelling* (Tafelberg, Kaapstad, 1972). p. 260.

49 J van Zyl, “Amanda Gouws, Maties se subversiewe suster”, *Die Burger*, 12 September 2002, p. 11.

50 Statistics South Africa 2001 (available at <http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/RSAPrimary.pdf>, as accessed on 24 April 2014), pp. 24-25.

51 E-mail: E Jordaan (ATKV-Dames)/L Maritz (Researcher), 30 March 2001.

Sabbath any longer, Sundays are traditionally a family day, definitely not a day to attend political meetings. Dene Smuts of the Democratic Party said that “the National Party (White) women did not always want to attend meetings on wet Sunday afternoons in the coloured areas – their husbands and family and they themselves did not want to do it, but it was the only time that workers in the ‘struggle’ could manage!”⁵² In the second place, the fact that the meetings did not open with a reading from Scripture and a prayer caused unhappiness.⁵³ Estelle Jordaan, however, took the bull by the horns during a national conference when once again the meeting was not opened with scripture and prayer. During the conference a report stated that 67% of women in South Africa regarded themselves as Christians. Jordaan used the opportunity to say that if that was the case, then the majority of women at the meeting were probably Christians and the meeting of the WNC should be opened in the “right manner”. Her comment was received with approval and applause. According to Jordaan, after that the meetings that she attended and the projects she was involved with were opened or closed with at least a prayer.⁵⁴ But apart from this occasion the issue was apparently never addressed as a factor.

Within the WNC itself, however, there were several different denominations. There was also the ANC alliance with the Communist Party. Kadalie believes that black women followed communist ideology selectively, because even though the “preached” communism, they were very religious and for that reason strongly opposed to abortion, for example.⁵⁵ In 1994 Joe Slovo, head of the South African Communist Party, commented on the religious leaders that attended and officiated during the funeral of the socialist atheist Chris Hani in April 1993. Slovo said that the core values of religion, and more specifically the practice of Jesus, namely cooperation, human equality, sharing and liberatory hope, are precisely the core values of socialism. He suggested that a constructive dialogue between Communists and Christians be opened “to find each other through our shared values and principles”.⁵⁶ White South Africans grew up with a fear of communist ideology, the red peril (“rooi gevaar”). “The writing on the wall is red” was a typical slogan, which gave

52 D Smuts, Vraelys, 4 September 2002.

53 L Geldenhuys (*National Party*), Questionnaire, 17 May 2001.

54 E-mail: E Jordaan (ATKV-Dames)/L Maritz (Researcher), 30 March 2001.

55 L Maritz (Personal Collection), interview, R Kadalie (*Women's Alliance*, political activist, academic), 11 June 2004.

56 J Slovo, “Shared values”, *The African Communist*, 136, First Quarter 1994, pp. 46, 53.

communism a Biblical connotation.⁵⁷ Since 1977 the “total onslaught” and “total strategy” were the catchwords of the beleaguered apartheid ideology. Sacrifices by whites, such as conscription, were seen as necessary, since the war was between extremes, “Christendom” against “atheism”, “democracy” against “totalitarianism”, and “order” against “chaos”. In 1985, with increasing unrest within the country, the SADF emphasised that the destabilisation was being orchestrated from Russia, and that the Russians were using the ANC to achieve their goals, which meant that the SADF was the protector of all groups in South Africa.⁵⁸

Afrikaner women were also “conscripted” and made part of the fight against communism. In 1978/79 the Federal Council of the National Party issued a pamphlet called “Women our silent soldiers”. The enemy was communism and women were the “invisible weapon”, “indispensable soldiers”. It was critical to recognise the enemy and women were warned against the “snake in one’s bosom”, since the enemy can hide even in the family, and in social and political circles. In 1986 *Vroue vir Suid-Afrika* issued a pamphlet in which women were encouraged to talk to their domestic workers. Examples of such conversations were provided where domestic workers were warned against the ANC, the United Democratic Front, the South African Council of Churches and communism.⁵⁹

So there are not many signs of Rhoda suggested points of contact in reality. What would have made the Afrikaner women’s experience of the WNC positive, despite their unenviable position and lack of a sense of community with black women? There needs to be a motive to become – and remain – involved.

Feminism

Could it have been feminism? The WNC could have been seen as a liberal feminist organisation. Because the WNC as an organisation was primarily oriented towards the empowerment of women and so had a strong feminist basis, it is necessary to outline some of the most important feminist views.

57 C Jansen, “Apartheid and religion” (available at <http://www.postfun.com/pfp/features/98/may/cjansen.html>, as accessed on 12 June 2004).

58 MJ Phillips, “The end conscription campaign, 1983-1988: A study of white extra-parliamentary opposition to apartheid”, pp. 22-23.

59 AJ Norval, *Deconstructing apartheid discourse* (London, Verso, 1996), pp. 203-205.

Feminism as an ideology refers to ideas advocated by women that aim to change the position and experience of women in contemporary societies, according to Andrietta Kritzing. Liberal feminism holds that women as a group are kept in a subordinate position in a male-dominated social and political system, and deprived of liberal values such as equality, freedom and justice. Liberal feminists believe that the solution to this problem is anti-discriminatory legislation. The initial goal of the WNC, namely that the Women's Charter should form part of the Constitution of South Africa to protect women's rights constitutionally, was liberal feminist in nature. Radical feminism, on the other hand, argues that women's gender, namely their sexuality and procreative function, is used by men to oppress them. Women thus demand control over their own bodies such as, for example, the right to decide for themselves on abortion.⁶⁰ Another feminist outlook is black feminism, which believes, according to Amanda Gouws, that oppression stems from the lack of recognition of the distinctiveness of the position of black women. Black feminists blame mainly white middle-class feminists, who marginalise black women.⁶¹

Black women's political awareness was shaped and developed over a period of seven decades. The intensified political actions during the 1980s, especially the "state of war", took women's political conscientisation to the next level.

On 12 June 1986 a country-wide state of emergency was declared and Magnus Malan, the Minister of Defence, was asked to restore order in the black townships. The inhabitants of the black townships experienced the state of emergency as a state of war. Given the police presence in the townships, the raids, murders and harassment, people's lives were disrupted and their property destroyed. Between June 1986 and June 1987 some 26 000 people were detained and 34 organisations banned.⁶²

By this time many black women were already active on a broad front. They played a central role in the founding of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in August 1983 and took part in protest actions on issues that affected communities, for example, forced resettlements, student harassment and bus boycotts. As workers they also participated in go-slow strikes and full strikes

60 A Kritzing, *The status of feminism and feminist theory* (Paper, University of Stellenbosch, 2004), pp. 1-3.

61 A Gouws's classification of feminism, M du Toit and A Krog, "Op pad na 'n inheemse feminisme", *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, 50, October 1994, pp. 22-23.

62 W Esterhuysen and P Nel (eds.), *The ANC* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1990), p. 20; S Dubow, *The African National Congress* (Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg, 2000), p. 92.

in factories, and made a contribution to the expansion of the democratic trade union movement and the subsequent formation of COSATU in November 1985. Women also played a part in the strong stand that COSATU adopted regarding women workers. In addition, women became involved in initiatives such as child care, adult literacy and self-help schemes such as *stokvels* (joint savings schemes).⁶³

Black women became politically engaged when their homes and communities were threatened, but during the state of emergency a new awareness emerged – Marcus calls it a revolutionary feminism. During this time women developed a broader understanding of their oppression as women and realised that the struggles for the liberation of women and of black people as a whole had to be waged simultaneously. Leila Patel, education officer at the Federation of Transvaal Women, said:⁶⁴

Our understanding of the special abilities of women is that they are rooted in exploitation, racial oppression and sexism. The battle against capitalism, racism and sexism cannot be fought as part of a three-stage plan – the struggle must be waged simultaneously at all these levels. We are committed to building women's organisation; to uniting women, to raising the voice of women in the national democratic struggle led by the working class. It is our task to develop working-class leadership amongst women and to allow working-class interests to dominate our women's organisations.

There is no indication that the Afrikaner women were particularly oriented towards feminist thinking, but rather tended to be apathetic and left the struggle for women's rights in men's hands. These women, who did not hold strongly feminist views, found themselves in the midst of the WNC as an overtly feminist movement that certainly incorporated more than one feminist line of thinking.

As an organisation the WNC was not of one mind with regard to feminism. This is evident from the fact that the WNC's initiative, namely that women's rights should be entrenched in the Constitution through a Women's Charter, failed somewhere along the line. The reasons for this change of plan can be explained by, among other things, the differences within the WNC, which included diverging opinions on the actual purpose of the Women's Charter. The more radical group within the WNC wanted to use the Women's Charter

63 T Marcus, "The women's question and national liberation in South Africa", M van Diepen (ed.), *The national question in South Africa* (Zed, London, 1988), pp. 103-104.

64 T Marcus, "The women's question...", M van Diepen (ed.), *The national question in South Africa...*, p. 106.

to mobilise the women's vote, while the more moderate members wanted to make the Women's Charter part of the legislative process.⁶⁵

Examples of the hostility with which Afrikaner women were received by those who could be labelled black feminists are legion. These black women, who could certainly blame the harm done to black people on the white ruling class, did not hesitate to criticise the Afrikaner women for the ideology of apartheid and in the process also openly rejected the use of the Afrikaans language. The chances of Afrikaner women developing a shared feminist vision with black women in the midst of so much hostility were slim. In contrast, Gertrude Fester⁶⁶ advocated an indigenous South African feminism that would incorporate elements from all the feminist schools of thought, while accepting the diversity of women.⁶⁷ Was a shared feminism possible in a capitalist system in which blacks were so superior in numbers? Was it possible that such a diverse group could hold a shared vision? Black women wanted to ensure that rights – which they never had in most cases – became part of their lives in the future South Africa. In contrast, Afrikaner women had to face the possibility that in future they would lose more than they would gain; their privileged position in South Africa was being jeopardised. Would Afrikaner women place themselves in the position of black women and so jointly fight against discrimination? Afrikaner women regularly gave of themselves for the sake of the wellbeing others, but that was different because it was on their terms. It is doubtful that Afrikaner women were sufficiently impassioned to fight for the political rights of their new-found “black” sisters. The writer, André Brink, says that the “ravages of apartheid” led to “subtle distortions of the mind”, which made it difficult, if not impossible, for whites to see a situation from the perspective of blacks, and this consequently led to lack of empathy and especially sympathy.⁶⁸ In 1991 most Afrikaner women were not ready for a common feminist vision.

Feminism was thus not a unifying factor within the WNC.

65 SK Abrams, “Fighting for women's liberation during the liberation of South Africa: The Women's National Coalition” (MA, Wadham College, Oxford, 2000), pp. 10-11.

66 G Fester, educator, activist, *Women's Alliance*, n.d.

67 R Kadalie, “Feminism and the role of black women movements”, *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, 50, October 1994, pp. 25-26.

68 A Brink, “Dakar: ANC and Afrikaners in dialogue”, *Democracy in Action*, October 1987, pp. 5-6.

Focusing on the goals of the WNC

Would it have been possible to focus on the goals of the WNC for the sake of a positive experience? Hilary Wainwright has argued that a successful women's movement has the ability to unite its members in addressing important issues, yet at the same time respecting political differences, but also to agree to differ, without causing harm to the movement.⁶⁹ In the case of the Afrikaner women in the WNC, they felt alienated most of the time, largely because of the political background that was associated with them. Iris Marion Young distinguishes between women as a "group" and women as a "series". As a group all the women, including those from Afrikaner cultural organisations, would have supported the goals of the WNC and as a group undertake to make it work. As a social collective that came from organisations that all had the protection of Afrikaner culture and a belief in Christianity, they would be seen as a "series". Although the Afrikaner women came from different organisations, they could act as individuals and at the same time be united in the goals that were common to the Afrikaner organisations. Young argues that there can be a relationship between a group and a series, but suggests that it must be a spontaneous group formation.⁷⁰ We know that the group formation was not spontaneous. The ANCWL's disillusionment that they were side-lined by the men in the ANC forced them into action to form a women's organisation. Afrikaner women were urged by Afrikaner leaders to move out of their comfort zone and reach out.⁷¹

In reality, the actual goals of the WNC were always suspect, because in the face of charges that it was a political instrument employed by the ANC, and the associated political intrigues and undertones, it could not do much to keep members focused. The non-political image of the WNC was seriously jeopardised, because the WNC did not exist or operate in a vacuum. Furthermore, the events at CODESA I and II and the multiparty negotiations, and the eventual breakdown of negotiations, had an impact on the relations and events within the WNC. Political tactics such as government's passing of the Bill of Fundamental Rights which contained clauses on equality and women's rights created even more divisions within the WNC. At a meeting in February 1993 women indicated indignation that the government were still

69 H Wainwright, "Beyond leadership", J Siltanen and M Stanworth (eds.), *Women and the public sphere, a critique of sociology and politics* (Hutchinson, London, 1984), p. 182.

70 IM Young, "Gender as seriality: Thinking about women as a social collective", *Signs*, 19(3) 1994, pp. 723-725, 735.

71 See section: If Afrikaner women were united as a group, p. 85.

making decisions on behalf of women. The NP women defended it as at least a step in the right direction.⁷²

Despite these political events, Afrikaner women would have experienced the WNC in a more positive way, if it could have focused on its goals. But one of the main objectives of the WNC, namely to incorporate a Women's Charter into the country's new constitution, failed. Although this was never directly stated, the Women's Charter project was delayed because the problems that arose during the negotiation process affected the WNC as well. Apart from the political tensions, the role players on the candidates list of the ANCWL lost their focus on the task at hand, because the negotiating process proceeded more quickly than the Women's Charter campaign.

It is also possible that the charge that the WNC was only a political smokescreen was true and that the most important task of the WNC was actually to educate eight million new (women) voters and to canvass their votes. Although all the political parties could have used this educational task for their own benefit, there were more accusations that this was in fact done mainly by the ANC. After the leaders of the ANCWL, who were prominent in the WNC, obtained seats in Parliament, the ANCWL turned its back on the WNC. This is sufficient proof that the organisation used the WNC as a political instrument. It can thus be readily accepted that the WNC was created to achieve (party) political objectives.

The WNC did eventually carry out its mandate and set up a Women's Charter, but the questionable conclusion of the campaign for the Women's Charter also made the end result somewhat suspect.

All the political influences and innuendo were problematic for most Afrikaner women. Apart from the fact that they felt "cheated" as they unwittingly became part of the political game, the goals of the WNC became irrelevant.⁷³

Sisterhood

Was there a possibility of the positive involvement of the Afrikaner women in the WNC in the notion of a "sisterhood" between the women of the

72 MCH 100 3.1.2, National Council, Minutes, 6 February 1993.

73 L Maritz, "Party politics jeopardised the credibility of the Women's National Coalition for Afrikaner women in the organisation", *New Contree*, 61, May 2011, pp. 116-117.

organisation?

“Sisters, Delegates and Comrades” are the opening words of Frene Ginwala’s speech during the inaugural meeting of the WNC on 25 April 1992. With this greeting she aimed at including all the delegates, but it also differentiated between them. Afrikaner women did not fall into the category of sisters or comrades; they were not black sisters and were not comrades in the struggle. Frene Ginwala later said in her speech that she hoped that there was something more that brought the women there than a “suddenly felt emotional response to a notion of sisterhood?” She hoped for “something more substantial that will help us to override our differences”.⁷⁴ Ginwala herself seemed to have discarded sisterhood as a unifying factor.

According to Louise Vincent, the idea of a united “sisterhood” has been largely discredited these days, precisely because of the diversity of women.⁷⁵ Shireem Hassim claims that political differences stood in the way of a common discourse on feminism and thus excluded the idea of “sisterhood”. There was no shared vision; the most that could be expected was solidarity in striving for the WNC’s goals.⁷⁶ This corresponds with Fidela Fouche’s view that women cannot unite as “sisters” or even as “women”, but there can be collaboration on issues affecting all women.⁷⁷ According to Desiree Hanson, feminism is not only a social theory, but also a political practice. If women do not have shared political, economic and social interests, and if their respective visions of liberation are determined by their specific position in social structures, then women’s liberation becomes a different issue for different women. Gender oppression is not the same for all women in South Africa.⁷⁸

It has been suggested that a kind of “sisterhood” can be built where the emphasis falls on the different kinds of gender oppression; where women who hold other views are acknowledged.⁷⁹ But at the time the diversity within the WNC did not allow a common feminist perspective nor the development of a “sisterhood”. In the words of Dene Smuts, these differences produced a “Women’s National Collision” rather than a “Coalition”; in others words, conflict rather than cooperation was the result.⁸⁰

74 MCH 100, 15.1.5.6 Workshops (National): Speech by Frene Ginwala, National Workshop, April 25-26, 1992.

75 L Vincent, “A question of interest: Women as opposition”, R Southall (ed.), *Opposition and democracy in South Africa* (Frank Cass, London, 2001), p. 78.

76 S Hassim, “A conspiracy of women”, *Social research*, 69 (3), fall 2002, pp. 704-705.

77 F Fouche, “Overcoming the sisterhood myth”, *Transformation*, 1994, 23, p. 79.

78 D Hanson, “Bridging the divides”, *Agenda*, 1992, 13, p. 35.

79 F Fouche, “Sisterhood”, *Sash*, January 1994, p. 8.

80 D Smuts, Questionnaire, 8 August 2004.

If Afrikaner women were united as a group

Would it have helped if the Afrikaner women had stood together as a group? Because Afrikaner women were in the minority, such solidarity would have empowered them literally and figuratively.

In her analysis of why women's movements organise, Maxine Molyneux distinguishes between three types, namely independent movements, associated linkages and directed mobilisations. Since it has been suggested that the ANCWL's initiative to form the WNC was a directive from the ANC, the WNC would be classified as a directed mobilisation.⁸¹ Women are mobilised to achieve a broader political goal, e.g. voter education of black women, whilst at the same time advancing women's interests. Afrikaner women in the WNC who represented the cultural organisations were also mobilised by Afrikaner leaders to join the WNC to broaden their vision.

It is very clear that most Afrikaner women's organisations represented in the WNC had as their goals the preservation of Afrikaner culture and Christianity. Afrikaner cultural organisations that were members of the WNC, although apparently apolitical, were representative of the moderate groups on the political spectrum, seeing that the more right-wing Afrikaner parties were not involved. But there were differences even among the moderates.⁸²

With the split in the National Party, when the break-away Conservative Party was established in 1982, divisions also arose between Afrikaner cultural organisations and churches. The founding of the Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk at that stage, which admitted only whites as members and justified this from the Bible, is an example of these divisions. Even the Afrikaner Broederbond split when the Conservative Party also established a secret organisation, Toekomsgesprek. In an attempt to play a unifying role that would transcend party politics, the Afrikaner-Volkswag was established in 1984. Among the most important aims of this organisation were the maintenance of the Afrikaans language, heightening of the Afrikaners' historical consciousness and the protection of Afrikaans educational institutions. But this organisation collapsed apparently because Prof. Carel Boshoff wanted to make its main preoccupation the need for an Afrikaner "volkstaat", an ideal not supported by all "right-wing" Afrikaners, and definitely not by "left-wing" Afrikaners. The

81 M Molyneux, "Analysing women's movements", *Development and Change*, 29(2), April 1998, pp. 229-230.

82 FAK, "Wie is ons? Afrikanergeskiedenis" (available at <http://www.afrikanergeskiedenis.co.za/wie-is-ons/>, as accessed on 25 October 2013).

consequence was that it became known as an ultra-conservative organisation and associated with far-right politics. Instead of ensuring Afrikaner unity, it ultimately created deeper divisions.⁸³

It is evident that in the 1980s and 1990s Afrikaner cultural organisations were facing a crisis of survival and there was also an underlying fear that they would not survive as a group in the future. In 1990 the Afrikaner-Kulturbond was established to act as the overarching cultural organisation for “right-thinking” Afrikaners.⁸⁴ This was an attempt to draw strength from numbers for the sake of survival.

But there was also pressure on these cultural groups to move away from exclusivity and reach out to fellow South Africans. The call for Afrikaners to become involved came mainly from the Afrikaner intelligentsia. On 23 March 1990 the Rand Afrikaans University held a seminar on the topic “Renewal in Afrikaner thinking”. Speakers were inter alia Hennie van Deventer, editor of *Die Volksblad*, Alan Boesak, Dutch Reformed Church minister and anti-apartheid activist, Willem Nicol, minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, Prof. Piet Meiring, head of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, and the writers Adam Small and André Brink. The goal of the seminar was that all Afrikaners must broaden their vision and become more inclusive.⁸⁵

Subsequent speeches by President FW de Klerk and his wife also sent out the message that Afrikaner women in particular must move out of their comfort zone and reach out to black South Africans and play a more active role in the political process. President de Klerk had a meeting with 22 representatives of Afrikaner culture organisations, including the ATKV, Jong Dames Dinamiek, and Dames Aktueel. The essence of these talks was that although Afrikaner culture must be protected and developed, there must be an outreach to the broad population of South Africa.⁸⁶

Thus when the invitation came from the ANCWL to participate in the establishment of a women’s organisation, Afrikaner culture organisations were forced out of their comfort zone and became involved.

83 Eie kantoor, “Vroue moet kan skiet, maar hulle ook geestelike bewapen”, *Die Burger*, 8 September 1993, p. 9; FW de Klerk, *Die laaste trek – ’n nuwe begin* (Human & Rousseau, Kaapstad, 1998), p. 107.

84 Politieke redaksie, “Kultuurbond verdeel regses meer Carel Boshoff blykbaar uitgedryf”, *Die Burger*, 7 Desember 1990, p. 2.

85 Own correspondent, “Saamtrekke vandag in Tvl oor Afrikaner”, *Die Burger*, 23 Maart 1990, p. 21.

86 Own correspondent, “A woman’s place”, *The Natal Mercury*, 28 September 1990, p. 6; Politieke redaksie, “Kultuurgroep wil deel hê aan die gesprek”, *Die Burger*, 24 November 1990, p. 11.

According to Molyneux, Afrikaner women joining the WNC was – as in the case of the ANCWL – directed collective action to achieve a general goal.⁸⁷ In its encouragement of Afrikaner women's organisations to join the WNC, the government had in mind, apart from conciliation, also attracting prospective voters. The Afrikaner women who were uninterested in politics were mobilised mainly for political reasons. The result was that when the Afrikaner cultural organisations become involved with the WNC, they did not feel at home in the prevailing political atmosphere. There was definitely not have a shared vision.

Conclusion

In their analysis of the WNC, Cock and Bernstein came to the conclusion that “one lesson we can draw from the experiences of women and the WNC is that differences in women's experiences need not be a barrier to coalition building”.⁸⁸ This article argues that for Afrikaner women and black women these differences were insurmountable. The suggested potential bases of cooperation proved to be problematic. There was very little common ground between the Afrikaner women and black women.

The fact that Afrikaner women experienced blatant antagonism definitely did not facilitate matters. When asked why they did not complain about the hostility they experienced in the WNC, the answer was they were “shy”.⁸⁹ They felt this way because there was continual reference to the “apartheid regime”. Afrikaner women's guilt about the past disempowered them, because they did not have the self-confidence to insist on equal treatment within the WNC. It was precisely with respect to the recognition of cultural groups in the future South Africa that Afrikaner women in the WNC could have made a contribution. Afrikaner women also had a golden opportunity to win back respect for, and trust in, Afrikaners and their culture, but they let the opportunity slip. The stigma attached to the Afrikaner, along with the uncertainty as to who exactly “the Afrikaner” was, prevented Afrikaner women from using the WNC as a platform. It has been indicated that the

87 M Molyneux, “Analysing women's movements”, *Development and Change*, 29(2), April 1998, p. 229.

88 J Cock and A Bernstein, “Gender differences: Struggles around ‘needs’ and ‘rights’ in South Africa”, *NWSA Journal*, 13(3), p. 151.

89 L Maritz (Personal Collection), interview, R Kadalie (*Women's Alliance*, political activist, academic), 11 June 2004.

hostility which greeted the Afrikaner women played a role in making them intolerant.⁹⁰

It could also be argued that the Afrikaner women also saw themselves as “victims” of the black women’s intolerance. The Afrikaner women were even accused of having a “victim mentality”. The implication was that women preferred to be inferior. It was suggested that the source of this mentality among the Afrikaner women was their religion.⁹¹ This victim mentality could have led to the focus on the negative factors rather than on the goals. In the case of the WNC, this consciousness could have immobilised the Afrikaner women, because as victims they were relieved of their responsibilities, such as becoming involved, for example. As victims, the Afrikaner women were thus simultaneously disempowered and free.

The WNC addressed the political changes too hastily, while the Afrikaner women were not ready for them, because even though they could accept that change was inevitable, these changes were not yet part of their mindset. Even though Afrikaners had begun to move out of their cultural cocoon, the inability of Afrikaner women to adapt was an indication that the process had not been completed. For the journalist Max du Preez the test was whether the Afrikaner women could rise above their comfort zones. Could they rise above local “Boere” politics and help the country advance along the road toward an open and tolerant dispensation? Could they make a significant contribution towards the dismantling of apartheid and were they truly concerned about human rights?⁹² In most cases the answer was No. Afrikaner women were caught up in a situation where they had to break away from the past, a familiar reality, but they could not yet master the new reality. The residue of apartheid and a “broken” culture were the baggage that Afrikaner women had to carry with them and that made adaptation difficult. Lack of political expertise played a large role and led to a focus on differences and problems rather than on commonalities. In some cases they simply “did not feel like” becoming involved in an organisation that lay beyond their field of interest.

In her opening address during the official founding of the WNC, Frene Ginwala said: “Our divisions have become barriers”, but her concluding

90 L Maritz, “‘In die vyand se kraal’. Die rol en ervaring van Afrikanervroue in die Women’s National Coalition”, *LitNet Akademies*, 7(3), Desember 2010 (available at <http://www.litnet.co.za/Article/in-die-vyand-se-kraal-die-rol-en-ervaring-van-afrikanervroue-in-die-womens-national>, as accessed on 3 June 2014).

91 J Hambidge, Panel discussion, Woordfees, Stellenbosch, 2004 (L Mariz, personal attendance).

92 M du Preez, “Voorloper op ’n smal paadjie”, *Die Burger*, 3 February 2003, p. 9.

words were: “Together we will win”.⁹³ Ginwala’s wish was both optimistic and idealistic.

Addendum: Member organisations of the WNC

African Christian Democratic Party
African Council of Hawkers & Informal Business
African Women’s Organisation (PAC)
Afro Hairdressing and Beauty
ANC Emancipation Department
ANC Women’s League
Anglican Women’s Fellowship
ATKV-Dames
AZAPO Women’s Organisation
Black Association of Travel Agents of South Africa
Black Housewives League
Black Lawyers Association
Black Management Forum
Black Sash
Bophelo Impilo Community Association
Catholic Women’s League
Central Islamic Trust
COSATU
Dames Aktueel
Democratic Party
Development Bank
Disabled People of South Africa
Executive Women’s Club
Foundation for African Business
Consumer of Service
Friendship Forum
Girl Guides Association of South Africa
Grail Women’s Leadership Training
IDASA
Ikageng Women’s Club
Inkatha Freedom Party
Institute of Contextual Theology

⁹³ MCH 100, 15.1.5.6, Workshops (National): Speech by Frene Ginwala, National Workshop, April 25-26, 1992.

Interdenominational Prayer Women's League
Jong Dames Dinamiek
KONTAK
Leadership institute
Methodist Women's Manyano
Methodist Women's Network
Municipal Educ. State Health and Allied Union
National Assembly of Women
National Association of Women Business Owners
National Congress of Trade Unions
National Council for the Physically Disabled
National Council for the Blind
National Council of Women of South Africa
National Party
National Spiritual Assembly of Bahai
National Stokvel Association of South Africa
National Union of Metalworkers
National Union of Mineworkers
National Youth Development Coordinating Committee
Ntataise
Pan African Congress
People Opposing Women Abuse
Planned Parenthood Association
Prowaldo
Rural Women's Movement
SA Agricultural Union (SA Landbou-unie)
SA Association Independent Schools
SA Association of Early Childhood
Educare
SA Association of Occupational Therapists
SA Association of University Women
SA Black Business and Professional Women's Network
SA Black Social Workers' Association
SA Black Taxi Association
SA Catholic Bishop's Conference
SA Communist Party
SA Council of Churches
SA Democratic Teachers Union
SA Domestic Workers Union
SA Fashion Designers Association

SA Federation of Business & Professional Women
SA Police Service
SA Society of Physiotherapy
SA Student Congress
SA Catholic Bishops Conference
SA Association of Early Childhood Education
Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie
Soroptimists International SA
The Grail
The Women's Lobby
TRAC
Transvaalse Landbou-unie
UDUSA
Union of Jewish Women of South Africa
Vroue Diens
Women's Leadership Institute
Women's Legal Status Committee
Women for Peace
Women for South Africa (Vroue vir Suid-Afrika)
Women's Bureau of South Africa (Vroueburo van Suid-Afrika)
Women's Development Banking
World Vision
Young Women's Network
YWCA