

Party politics jeopardised the credibility of the *Women's National Coalition* for Afrikaner women in the organisation

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Samevatting

Die Women's National Coalition (WNC) is in 1992 amptelik gestig en was 'n inisiatief van die African National Congress Women's League. Die doelwitte van die WNC was om inligting oor vroue se behoeftes en aspirasies in te samel en dit in 'n Vrouehandves saam te vat wat uiteindelik 'n integrale deel van die nuwe Grondwet van Suid-Afrika sou word. Vanweë talle praktiese probleme, asook haar gebrek aan politieke vernuf, het die Afrikanervrou moeilik by die WNC aangepas. Daarby het die vyandigheid van swart vroue wat die vergaderings van die WNC domineer het, verder die Afrikanervrou se betrokkenheid in die wiele gery. In hierdie artikel val die soeklig op hoe die politieke gebeure tydens die onderhandelings vir 'n nuwe demokratiese bestel die WNC en Afrikanervroue beïnvloed het.

Keywords: Women's National Coalition; Afrikaner women; Afrikaner Women's organisations; Women's Charter; Political smokescreen; ANCWL.

Introduction

When public negotiations for a new democratic dispensation in South Africa started in 1990, a new era began in which numerous human rights issues came to the fore. Women also used this opportunity to put women's issues and gender relations on the national agenda in an attempt to redress the injustices of the past.

Black women's political consciousness developed over many decades. But in the 1980s during the state of emergency and increased political action, they became aware of their suppression as women and realised that the liberation

of women and black people had to be seen as one struggle.¹ At a conference, in April 1991, shortly after the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC), the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) decided on the need of a women's charter that would reflect women's rights, the appointment of a commission that would be a watchdog against the violation of women's rights in the ANC and to demand that at least 30% of the elected ANC posts had to be filled by women. They were however disillusioned when in July 1991, during the national conference of the ANC, they were coerced to accept that the ANC was not going to grant them the demanded 30% quota. This was underlined when during the first round of negotiations at Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) only men were part of the negotiating team. The ANCWL realised that women could be excluded from the political processes that would determine the future of South Africa. Their frustration led to the decision that the women's voice had to be fortified by bringing together a network of women to stop the suppression and marginalising of women. On 27 September 1991 forty women, representing over thirty organisations, came together to discuss the possibility of a national women's structure. On 26 April 1992 the Women's National Coalition (WNC) was officially founded.²

The aim of this organisation was to gather information on women's needs and aspirations, and to draw up a Women's Charter that would become an integral part of the new South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996).³ Women's organisations were invited to join the WNC. Eventually about 100 organisations joined the WNC, of whom about thirteen were Afrikaner women's organisations (see appendix after the conclusion).

This article will briefly look at the Afrikaner women's organisations that joined the WNC, why they joined and how they fitted in. Since there were so many accusations from Afrikaner women of the negative role played by politics in the WNC, this article will try to put the political influences into perspective. It will also highlight the most important political events during the negotiation period that had an impact on the WNC, and particularly on Afrikaner women, and eventually shaped the goals of the organisation.

1 Black women's political struggle is well documented. E.g. Cheryl Walker, *Women and resistance in South Africa*, 2nd edition (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1991).

2 S Hassim, "'A conspiracy of women': The women's movement in South Africa's transition to democracy", *Social Research*, vol. 69, No. 3 (Fall 2002), pp. 696, 698, 710-711.

3 MCH 100 1.1 The constitution of the WNC, 6 February 1993.

Afrikaner womens organisations that joined the WNC

Afrikaner women generally were not interested in politics. Until 1981 only three Afrikaner women were elected to Parliament and only one, Dr Rina Venter, in 1989 obtained a Cabinet post. Various factors contributed to this apathy of which patriarchy and Calvinism, that kept women subservient and obedient, were the main reasons.⁴ Afrikaner women joined organisations that were based on Christian values where the main focus was to promote Afrikaner culture, welfare and the development of other Afrikaner women. These were also the organisations that joined the WNC.

The Afrikaner women's organisations that had a focus on Afrikaner culture, Die Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging - Dames (ATKV-Dames), Dames Aktueel, Jong Dames Dinamiek and Die Dameskring were represented on the WNC. The Afrikaner welfare organisation, Suid-Afrikaanse Vrouefederasie (SAVF) and the Vroue Landbou-unie (Suid-Afrikaanse en Transvaalse) (SAVLU) whose main focus was the development of adult women, also sent representatives. Two communication groups joined, namely Kontak, established in 1976 to promote a better understanding and respect between all the people in South Africa and Vroue vir Suid-Afrika that wanted to create a network of moderates. Members of the latter were again mostly the abovementioned culture organisations. These organisations represented thousands of Afrikaner women. The Women's Outreach Foundation, although with an English name, was founded by Marike de Klerk to focus on the upliftment of rural women. There were also Afrikaans speaking women in the Women's Bureau of South Africa (Vroueburo van Suid-Afrika). The two political parties the Nasionale Party Vroueaksie and the Democratic Party's (Women's Forum) joined and both had Afrikaans speaking women who were active in the WNC.⁵ It is evident that there were no Afrikaner womens organisations that had a specific focus on gender or the empowerment of women.

Even before these organisations were invited to join the WNC in late 1991, there was pressure from Afrikaner leaders and intelligentsia that the Afrikaner must reach out to other groups. On 23 March 1990, two months after

4 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. 46-70.

5 K Menell and M Jobson, *Women's rights in South Africa: A guide to national organisations with a gender focus* (Pretoria, 1995).

President De Klerk's announcement in Parliament, there was as a seminar at the Rand Afrikaner University with the topic "Renewal of Afrikaner thought" (Vernuwning in Afrikanerdenke). The speakers were Hennie van Deventer, editor of *Die Volksblad*, Willem Nicol, minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, prof. Piet Meiring, head of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the writers André Brink and Elsa Joubert. The message was that the Afrikaner must broaden its vision and become more inclusive.⁶

A few months later there was a plea by Marike de Klerk, wife of then President, that women should play a more active role in the political process. She said that although Calvinism requires women to be more subservient, she was asking for a more active, meaningful participation and not unbridled feminism.⁷

Shortly after this, the then president De Klerk met with 22 representatives of Afrikaner cultural organisations. The Afrikaner women's cultural organisations that eventually joined the WNC were also present at the meeting. De Klerk's message was that although there must be a balance between keeping cultural identity and to promote national unity, he was urging the Afrikaner to guard against elitism and to reach out to the broad public.⁸

A few months later, Willie Esterhuyse, professor of Philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch, made a public call for women to become involved in the transitional process. He encouraged women to reach out to the black woman, make contact and build trust.⁹

There was thus a clear message to Afrikaner women that they had to move out of their comfort zone and reach out to black women. Therefore, when the invitations to join the WNC reached Afrikaner women's organisations late 1991 and early 1992, they were ready and prepared to fight for gender equality in the new South Africa.

Afrikaner culture organisations that joined the WNC, although apolitical, represented the more moderate political spectrum since the right-wing Afrikaner groupings, the Conservative Party (CP) and the Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging (AWB), did not to take part in CODESA or join the WNC.

6 Eie korrespondent, "Saamtrekke vandag in Transvaal oor Afrikaner", *Die Burger*, 23 March 1990, p. 21.

7 Own correspondent, "A woman's place", *The Natal Mercury*, 28 September 1990, p. 6.

8 Politieke redaksie, "Kultuurgroepe wil deel hê aan gesprek", *Die Burger*, 24 November 1990, p.11.

9 Eie korrespondent, "Vroue kan klimaat van vertroue help bou", *Die Burger*, 22 March 1991, p. 12.

As far as the right-wing was concerned, the Government was selling out the country to the blacks. Conservative women who were never politically active became involved at this early stage. As early as 24 February 1990, a few weeks after De Klerk's surprise announcement, Marike de Klerk was the speaker at a Dames Aktueel meeting of more than 600 women in Bloemfontein. A right-wing woman, a medical practitioner from Bloemfontein, tried her utmost to disrupt the function. Before the meeting she unleashed a stink bomb and during the meeting she lashed out at the State President's wife with so many aggressive political questions that she was asked to keep quiet.

In her speech, De Klerk responded to the incident and said that she had sympathised with people's fears and uncertainties and their search for security. She tried to defend government policy and conduct and also attempted to minimise the importance of the ANC as the main negotiating party.¹⁰ Nevertheless, for right-wing Afrikaners the changes brought about by the National Party were revolutionary and unacceptable.

Afrikaner women that represented their organisations were uncomfortable in the WNC. Their lack of political expertise left them uncertain and insecure of the black women who did not only form the top structure of the WNC, but were often more politically astute. At the same time, the negative and hostile attitude of the black women towards them made them feel unwelcome and ignored. To attend WNC meetings was problematical for white women. The venues were convenient for black and coloured women and in areas where white women often felt unsafe. Meetings were badly organised and often started hours late. In the meetings, the consensus style of decision-making was foreign and time consuming for the Afrikaner women. The result was that many women lost interest and stayed away. Although thousands of women were theoretically represented on the WNC, in practice they were often represented by a handful of women. This was due to the fact that Afrikaner women's leadership was held in the hands of relatively few women who were often involved in more than one organisation. When these women experienced the abovementioned problems and stayed away, only a few Afrikaner women remained.¹¹

10 Eie Korrespondent, "Aanvalle teen SP-vrou ontstel", *Die Burger*, 27 February 1990, p. 6. Eie Korrespondent, "Regse versuur vergadering", *Die Volksblad*, 26 February 1990.

11 L Maritz, "In die vyand se kraal." Die rol en ervaring van Afrikanervroue in die Women's National Coalition, *Litnet Akademies Jaargang 7(3)*-Desember 2010, pp. 259-301, (http://www.oulitnet.co.za/akademies_geestes/pdf/LA_3_maritz.pdf).

During this research, the names of about 50 Afrikaner women that played a leading role were provided, but only 20 were prepared to co-operate in this research.¹² During the research, the abovementioned factors were mentioned, but it was above all, the party politics that eventually made it impossible for them to believe in the integrity of the WNC and left many with a residue of negativity.

The WNC as a party-political front

There was the hope that a united women's front would be established to achieve the common goals of the WNC and that the differences in the political groupings would not impact negatively on the WNC. An example of this possibly idealistic desire was the short hand-written sentence that Frene Ginwala, founder and convenor of the WNC, added to the copy of the speech that she presented at the inaugural meeting of the WNC. She sent this to Anne Routier of the National Party (NP): "To Ann. A chasm is bridged the easier if hands reach out from both sides to come together. Frene Ginwala".¹³

But Afrikaner women were soon disillusioned. Almost all the Afrikaner respondents expressed the view in one way or another that the WNC was a political "smokescreen". The purpose of such a remark was to suggest that the WNC was a front movement for the African National Congress (ANC) in order to get the female vote. Some respondents even thought that the ANCWL had no power, as was illustrated by their failed quota request, that 30% of all elected positions in the ANC be filled with women, and that all initiatives, even the establishment of the WNC, came from the National Executive Council of the ANC.¹⁴

Truida Prekel, representative for the Women's Bureau, also felt that black women had a hidden agenda. She overheard a black woman saying that "She will show Cyril (Ramaphosa) that she will get 7 000 votes (in the upcoming election)."¹⁵ Dene Smuts, from the Democratic Party (DP), also saw the WNC as the ANC's mobilisation of women and that Frene Ginwala's appointment

12 Research was conducted by interviews, questionnaires and mail. For correspondence and oral sources, see L Maritz, "Afrikanervroue se politieke betrokkenheid in historiese perspektief met spesiale verwysing na die Women's National Coalition van 1991 tot 1994", Bibliography.

13 Personal Collection. Speech by F Ginwala, April 1992, sent to A Routier.

14 L Maritz (Personal Collection), interview, J Malan, (former president of *Vroue vir Suid-Afrika*), 5 March 2001. She used the Afrikaans word "foefie" [lit. "gimmick"].

15 L Maritz (Personal Collection), interview, T Prekel (representative for *Women's Bureau*), 28 August 2001.

as Speaker of Parliament was the most concrete result of this.¹⁶ Jenny Malan, representative for Vroue vir Suid-Afrika, felt that the ANC had a well-planned strategy with the WNC and that Frene Ginwala, as strategic thinker, implemented it. According to her, Margaret Lessing, founder of the Women's Bureau, and Francis Bosman, a co-opted lawyer, also held this view.¹⁷

Although the NP joined the WNC, it did not support its goals. It even seems as if the NP government did not recognise the right of existence of the WNC, because at no stage was there any acknowledgement of the work and goals of the organisation. Apart from ignoring the WNC, the government was of the opinion that a separate Women's Charter would not carry the same weight legally as a detailed exposition of women's rights contained in a bill of fundamental rights.¹⁸ In October 1992 the Western Cape regional¹⁹ coalition expressed its dismay over statements made by Sheila Camerer, the Deputy Minister of Justice, on the television programme Agenda. As spokesperson for the NP she questioned and also cast suspicion on the activities of the coalition.²⁰

It can be argued that the NP also wanted to use the WNC only for political image building. Firstly, it would have been unacceptable if the NP was present at the negotiating table with the ANC but was absent from the WNC, a nationwide project that was initiated by the ANC. Secondly, visibility at the WNC was necessary for attracting the women's vote in the upcoming election.

The apolitical image of the WNC was not only jeopardised by the ANC. There is also evidence that the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) wanted to take control of the WNC. Mohau Pheko was appointed as Chief Executive Officer of the WNC after 1994. Her father, Motsoko Pheko, was deputy leader of the PAC and Member of Parliament. It was discovered that she used the organisation for party-political purposes. She appointed PAC members to represent the WNC at every possible occasion.²¹ Dene Smuts saw Mohau Pheko's short term of office as proof that the ANC could not tolerate a person

16 Questionnaire: D Smuts (*Democratic Party*), 4 September 2002.

17 L Maritz (Personal Collection), interview, J Malan, 5 March 2001.

18 A van Wyk, "Women's rights: a starting-point", *RSA Policy Review*, 6, July 1993, pp. 39-40.

19 The WNC made provision for regional coalitions, e.g. Western Cape, Gauteng, and Free State. Regional coalitions consisted of representatives of national organisations but also for local organisations. Each region had two representatives on the National Council and one on the Steering Committee.

20 Mayibuye Centre, University of the Western Cape, Papers of the *Women's National Coalition* (MCH 100) 4.1.3.1.2: Steering Committee, correspondence, J Thomson (Women's Alliance Western Cape)/Steering Committee, 21 October 1992.

21 Name withheld. Respondent requested that the comments on Pheko be "off the record".

from an opposing party as Chief Executive Officer of the WNC.²²

One of the two aims of the WNC was to gather information and to ensure that this was done through a process that would empower women. In order to reach this goal they focused on women who had been previously disenfranchised, hence primarily black and coloured women, and especially rural women. The WNC had focus groups that went out to make women aware of their rights; they had the women fill in questionnaires and interviewed them. There is no doubt that some of these women who were sent out to gather information for the WNC also gave voter education and did party canvassing.²³ One of the reasons for the split between the NP and the WNC early in 1994 was the accusation that the ANC was using the organisation for political canvassing.²⁴

For Estelle Jordaan, organiser for the ATKV-Dames, it was an established fact that the ANC/ South African Communist Party (SACP)/ Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) alliance tried to use the WNC as part of its own political agenda. She argue that information gathered in focus groups was also available to other political parties, but they did not use the opportunity to exploit it.²⁵

Although party politics jeopardised the cohesion of the WNC, it is evident that Afrikaner women who were unconditionally positive about the WNC did not emphasise political overtones or undertones. Amanda Botha, representative of the Kaapse Vroueklub, vehemently denied these accusations. She claimed to have moved close to the inner circles of the WNC and to have been part of the mainstream and would therefore have been aware of such a strategy. She admitted that there was political influence, but that it was kept in check. At the inaugural meeting there was an attempt by the SACP, which formed the most powerful group along with the COSATU, to gain the leadership of the WNC. The ANC and PAC did their utmost to prevent this. Botha contended that attempts by the ANCWL to take control were stopped by Frene Ginwala and that their access to the WNC was ultimately the same as that of any other organisation. This happened after Dene Smuts, from the Democratic Party, made an arrangement with Frene Ginwala to disregard the demands of the ANCWL and Winnie Mandela. According to Botha, the NP and the Afrikaans press can be blamed for insinuating that the WNC

22 Questionnaire: D Smuts, 4 September 2002.

23 L Maritz (Personal Collection), Interview, T Prekel, 28 August 2001.

24 See Relationship between ANC and NP reaches breaking point for the Steering Committee's explanation.

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

was an ANC smokescreen.²⁶ Dioné Prinsloo, historian from UNISA who was co-opted into the WNC for specific expertise, also denied undue political influencing.²⁷ Afrikaner women who did not pick up the political undertones were accused of being like the English-speaking white women, the so-called “pink liberalists”.²⁸

Political events as backdrop for events in the WNC

The period from 1991, when the first meetings of the WNC were held, until the handing over of the Women's Charter to the government in August 1994, was also the period during which the negotiations for a new dispensation in South Africa were conducted before the first democratic elections in 1994. It was a critical period in the history of South Africa, because if the negotiations failed, the chances for a peaceful transition of power would have been slim. It was inevitable that the stresses experienced during the negotiations would spill over and affect the WNC.

In September 1991 the various groups signed the National Peace Initiative. Months of negotiations culminated in the establishment of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) on 20 December 1991, a multiparty conference to put in place the various mechanisms for the transition to a democratic South Africa. Nineteen groups attended it.²⁹

Right-wing white politics was a major problem for the government right from the beginning of the negotiation process. White support moved away from the NP to the right wing and the subsequent radicalisation and growth of the AWB posed a serious threat to the negotiating process. Worried about these events, the then President De Klerk promised white voters that they could indicate in a referendum whether they supported the negotiations. On 17 March 1992 an overwhelming majority of the white electorate (68.6%) voted in favour of negotiations.³⁰

26 L. Maritz (Personal Collection), interview, Amanda Botha (representative for *Kaapse Vroueclub*), November 1996 and 15 August 2001. The *Kaapse Vroueclub* was established in March 1975. Their aim was to bypass apartheid and to bring Afrikaans speaking Cape women together. They also reached out to black women.

27 Interview, Dioné Prinsloo (UNISA), March 1999 and November 2002.

28 Name withheld.

29 JM Rantete, *The African National Congress and the negotiated settlement in South Africa* (Pretoria, Van Schaik, 1998), pp. 173-174.

30 JM Rantete, *The African National Congress and the negotiated settlement*, pp. 180-181.

Within the Afrikaner milieu, Afrikaners who voted for change were seen by the other 30% as left-wing and as traitors who want to sell out their country to blacks. However, when this “leftist” group joined the WNC, they felt unwelcome because they were still part of the white group that supported the apartheid government, the political ruling class.

During this period a lot of hard work was being done to get the WNC started. The basis of the coalition was broadened and the aims, processes and structure were clarified. Black and white women were very aware of the disturbances and undercurrents in the country. Conditions in the country were reported not only daily in the media, but were also discussed in millions of homes. Whereas the white government still tried to retain control at the constitutional negotiations, the situation at the WNC was the exact opposite. The black women, including political heavyweights such as Frene Ginwala who was part of the ANC National Commission for the Emancipation of Women, and Gertrude Shope, president of the ANCWL, played the leading roles, while the politically inexperienced Afrikaner women were in the background. Ginwala was also part of Working Group 2 of CODESA that formulated the constitutional principles, a process that eventually led to the collapse of the negotiations.

The collapse of CODESA II in May 1992 was followed by a wave of militancy. On 17 June 1992, 46 women and children were killed in their sleep in Boipatong, an ANC stronghold in the Vaal Triangle.³¹ Nelson Mandela blamed the government for the Boipatong incident and accused it of cold-blooded murder. On 22 June 1992 the ANC officially withdrew and took ten ANC-allied parties with them.³² All negotiations were terminated.

Estelle Jordaan, an organiser for ATKV-Dames, received her first invitation to attend a WNC meeting after the Boipatong massacre. At the meeting there was a predominance of ANC and COSATU women. There were only about five white women present and she was the only Afrikaans-speaking participant. Valli Moosa, who had participated in the negotiations for the ANC, was a speaker at this meeting and in his speech he asked the women to condemn the Boipatong massacre. He was outspoken on the government’s role and the alleged transgressions of the army before and after the incident. There were also women who spoke emotionally about the incident. The meeting

31 FW de Klerk, *Die laaste trek – ’n nuwe begin* (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1998), p. 257.

32 “Boipatong massacre, still no real answers”, 6 October 2000 (available at <http://www.mwebMedia24>, as accessed on 21 January 2003).

wanted to issue a media statement on behalf of the women of South Africa, declaring that the alleged involvement of the army was unacceptable. Estelle Jordaan stood up and said that, according to her sources, there were reasons for the strong actions by the army and that a commission of enquiry had already been appointed. She continued that a media statement would not be representative of all the women of South Africa, since not all were represented at the meeting. ATKV-Dames would distance themselves from such a media statement. She pointed out that she was the only Afrikaner woman present and that there were many Afrikaner women's organisations that could have been invited. Although there was some grumbling at her response, it was decided that if the other women's organisations wish, they could issue their own media statements.

The following Monday, Feroza Adams (Member of the Executive Committee of the ANCWL for the PWV area and for the ANC region of Hillbrow/Berea, later ANC Member of Parliament) phoned Estelle Jordaan and asked her to attend a WNC meeting for the Gauteng region's Management Committee – they wanted her on the executive committee. At the meeting, a white English woman greeted her “in shock” and said that she thought that as an Afrikaner woman she would not want to be involved after the Saturday meeting. According to Jordaan, that comment and the mere thought that others would think that she would run away from verbal conflict and the opportunity to work together with black women made her even more determined to become really involved and to remain involved.³³ Jordaan as one of the few Afrikaner women who did not hesitate to express her opinions was prepared to work together with others by ignoring the overt party politics.

Three months of political tension followed the collapse of CODESA 2. The party politics and uncertainty spilled over into the WNC. By the end of 1992 the WNC had not started to draw up programmes of action. Although leadership consistently denied that politics played a role in the WNC, the opposite was demonstrably true. Annemarie Nutt, representative from KONTAK, mentioned that with the breakdown of CODESA, “the WNC was under immense pressure, but there was never a split”. According to her, this can be attributed to “the responsibility with which the ANC Alliance, the NP, DP and others handled the moot points” at the various meetings that were held countrywide.³⁴ In the convener's report the slow progress was

33 E-mail: E Jordaan (Organiser, *ATKV-Dames*)/L Maritz, 30 March 2001.

34 Questionnaire, Annemarie Nutt (National Executive, *KONTAK*), no date.

blamed on technical aspects such as finance and staff problems. She also said that the “process of building relationships, given the various background from which we came, has also taken time”. She admitted that “The WNC had unrealistic expectations that were based on hope rather than reality”. The convener mentioned that the increased violence affected many communities and had an impact on the operations of the WNC.³⁵

On 5 April 1993 the multi-party negotiations resumed. Inkatha, the CP, the Afrikaner-Volksunie, the PAC and 3 delegates who represented the traditional leaders attended the negotiations. In the meantime the right-wing Afrikaner groups, led by General Constand Viljoen and Dr Ferdie Hartzenbergh, mobilised as the Afrikaner Vryheidsunie. On 25 June the AWB gathered at the World Trade Centre and caused chaos and destruction when they drove through the huge plate-glass windows and took control of the building for the next couple of hours. This act could not stop the negotiation process and at the beginning of July 1993 the date for the first full democratic elections, 27 April 1994, was announced.³⁶

Government’s legislation on the discrimination against women is politicised

In the elections, eight million new female voters, mostly black women, would be allowed to vote for the first time. Political parties realised the importance of the women’s vote that constituted 54% of the total population.

The first steps by the government were taken on 29 January 1993 when they signed six international conventions that focused on women’s and children’s rights. One of them was the “Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women” (CEDAW). The United Nations had enforced it as a treaty in 1981 already.³⁷ According to Estelle Jordaan (ATKV-Dames), the NP did not want to sign the declaration earlier, but when they saw that the women’s movement was moving ahead full steam, they agreed to sign it. She alleged that many Afrikaner women’s organisations thought that, since the government had signed CEDAW, the proposed Women’s Charter of

35 MCH 100 3.2.1: National Council, reports, 6 February 1993; MCH 100 3.1.2: National Council, minutes, 6 February 1993.

36 JM Rantete, *The African National Congress and the negotiated settlement*, pp. 205-208.

37 C Lowe-Morna, “Overview”, *Redefining Politics, South African Women and Democracy* (Commission on Gender Equality, Johannesburg, 1999), p. 27.

the WNC was not necessary.³⁸

The next step taken by the government was at the beginning of February 1993 when they introduced the proposals for a Bill of Fundamental Rights. The document, which contained clauses on equality and women's rights, was supported by three draft bills, which aimed at eliminating all remaining statutory and structural discrimination against women. There were apparently still 23 laws that contained discriminating measures. The draft bills were the Prevention of Domestic Violence Bill, the Promotion of Equality between Men and Women Bill, and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities Draft Bill.³⁹

The government circulated the draft bills for comment and shortly afterwards they were presented to a WNC meeting (6 February 1993) by a female white advocate from the Department of Justice. During the discussion, fundamental differences among the participants surfaced that led to tension. There was indignation, frustration and even rage that the government was still adopting a "top-down" approach and were making decisions on behalf of women. When an Afrikaner woman defended the government's intentions and pointed out that this was a step forward, the meeting acknowledged that the NP women did in fact gain a "small" victory in their party. Despite the initial reaction to the draft bills, it was eventually concluded that the discussions were managed in a sensitive way. It illustrated the deep-rooted commitment of the participants to work through differences to reach the goals of the WNC.⁴⁰

Frene Ginwala wrote to the Minister of Justice on behalf of the WNC and expressed her concern over the proposed legislation. She was outspoken over the fact that women were not consulted during the drafting of the bills and added that it was unacceptable that they were only now allowed to comment. She explained that one of the main aims of the research of the WNC was to give women a share in addressing women's issues.⁴¹

The national newspapers expressed mixed reactions to the proposed draft bills. Whereas the Afrikaans press welcomed the proposed legislation,⁴² the English press took a more critical view. The main objection was that the draft

38 Questionnaire: E Jordaan (*ATKV-Dames*), 30 March 2001.

39 A van Wyk, "Women's rights ...", *RSA Policy Review*, No. 6, July 1993, p. 37.

40 MCH 100 3.2.1: National Council, report, National Council meeting, 6 February 1993; MCH 100 3.1.2: National Council, minutes, first Council meeting, 6 February 1993.

41 MCH 100 3.3.2.9: National Council, correspondence, Frene Ginwala / Minister of Justice, 25 February 1993.

42 "Vroue sê hul sê oor vrou se rol in SA" *Beeld*, 26 February 1993, p. 8.

bills were “both a unilateral action by an illegitimate minority government and a ploy to woo the support and, in the longer term, the votes of women for the NP”. The general feeling was that the draft bills should have waited until the establishment of the new legitimate government.⁴³ In the meantime the ANC was also using the media to canvass for the women’s vote. Cyril Ramaphosa of the ANC expressed his concern over the position of women and said that women were the most oppressed group in the country. “This would no longer be allowed. Not in a democracy”.⁴⁴

At that stage the government took a further step to gain women’s votes and appointed Sheila Camerer as Deputy Minister of Justice on 1 April 1993. She emphasised that women had definitely been subject to legal and structural discrimination as a result of the lack of representation. Camerer admitted that the government was aware of the political power of women. Since black women were particularly subject to family violence, the Prevention of Domestic Violence Bill was aimed at attracting the votes of the black women in particular.

These two draft bills, namely the Prevention of Domestic Violence Bill and the Promotion of Equality between Men and Women Bill, were tabled in Parliament in June 1993.⁴⁵

The relationship between the ANC and the NP reaches breaking point

According to Estelle Jordaan (ATKV-Dames), Afrikaner women did not only look to the NP for guidance but also relied on it to be the spokesperson for the Afrikaner organisations. This guidance was tentative, however, since the strained relationship between the NP and the ANC around the negotiating table affected the WNC. Every time the NP Vroueaksie indicated that they were going to withdraw from the WNC, “there was a flurry of rumours and the decision makers of the Afrikaner women’s organisations could not leave fast enough”.⁴⁶ Since Afrikaner women were uncomfortable in the WNC, they were only too ready to leave.

43 Y Sadie and M van Aardt, “Women’s issues in South Africa ...”, *Africa Insight*, 1995, 25:2, p. 82; “Equality for women”, *The Star*, 3 May 1993, p. 10; “Change: it’s better late than never”, *Pretoria News*, 4 February 1993, p. 6; “Imperfect but a start”, *The Star*, 8 February 1993, p. 12.

44 “Vroue moet lig loop vir skelmstreek”, *Tempo en Monitor*, 15 April 1993.

45 A van Wyk, “Women’s rights ...”, *RSA Policy Review*, no. 6, July 1993, pp. 34-43.

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

In the middle of 1993, Anne Routier, the NP representative in the WNC, resigned. Since the documents provide no reasons, one can only speculate. Apparently, with the negotiations on track and the election date set, party political tensions increased in the WNC. It seems that the Steering Committee persuaded Routier to withdraw her resignation, since she still attended meetings afterwards.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, on 15 February 1994 the situation reached breaking point and the NP resigned from the WNC. In a letter to Frene Ginwala, Anne Routier accused the WNC of not being impartial and appeared as a front for the ANC. These claims were substantiated by the fact that at a WNC launch in Kempton Park, T-shirts with the ANC emblem were sold and T-shirts saying "Mandela for president" were worn by large numbers of women. On another occasion in Pietersburg posters were displayed with the picture of President De Klerk saying 'Wanted... Criminal for political offences'.

Routier also pointed out that in certain areas voter education programmes were undertaken in the name of the WNC by ANC candidates, e.g. in the Natal Midlands. When challenged about the political slant of certain voter education in the Northern Transvaal the NP representative was told 'the ANC is giving us our car, our petrol and our money. We will not change a word.'

She also mentioned that far less research was undertaken than was originally planned by the Coalition because of delays caused by the in-fighting between researchers and the executive of the Coalition. As a result, the report has been handed over nine months late, and was certainly not as comprehensive as it should have been.

She concluded that in view of the fact that a sub-council on the status of women has been established as part of the Transitional Executive Council and that the NP has a representative on the sub-council, their efforts on women's issues would in future be directed through the sub-council and subsequently through the women in Parliament and within the NP.⁴⁸

This step by the NP must obviously be seen against the background of the approaching election. The examples given by the NP to support their charge that the WNC was politicised were valid. It would have been unusual, however, if the NP did not react, especially against the provocative caption with the

47 MCH 100 4.1.1.9: Steering Committee, minutes, 19/20 June 1993.

48 MCH 100 3.3.1.32: National Council, correspondence, A Routier / F Ginwala, 15 February 1994; G van Rensburgh, "NP-vroue bedank uit NVK omdat dit 'n 'ANC-front' is", *Beeld*, 16 February 1994, p. 2.

photo of De Klerk. The most important charge was that the results of the research among women in order to draft the Women's Charter were handed in nine months after the due date and the report was also less comprehensive than initially intended.

The WNC responded to the accusation by rejecting the suggestion that the Coalition has become a front for the ANC. Since the WNC has never prevented organisations from distributing their promotional material at events, misunderstandings have arisen over the presence of stalls and that the Steering Committee recognise the need to sensitise members on the necessity of promoting the non-party political image of the Coalition. The WNC did not deny the accusations of political canvassing, but emphasised that this was not an instruction of the organisation. It had been reported at Steering Committee meetings that various regions (that are autonomous) have included voter education in their programmes, but they did so out of their own resources. The Independent Election Committee also used WNC women to provide voter education that was not party related. The Steering Committee also differed from the NP's interpretation of the reasons for the delay of the research report, but indicated that the matter would be discussed further at a later stage. The Steering Committee urged the NP to reconsider its resignation.⁴⁹

According to Anne Routier, after receiving this explanation and after a delegation came to see the NP, they thoroughly weighed up the assurances given by the coalition and decided to withdraw their resignation until after the women's conference that was scheduled for the following weekend.⁵⁰ Despite this decision, the NP, on instruction from their Federal Council, finally resigned from the WNC three weeks later.⁵¹ This was a few weeks before the election and it seems that the tension between the different parties played a role.

The Women's Charter campaign lost direction

The WNC chose not to respond to the accusations of the NP that the

49 MCH 100 4.1.3.2.5: Steering Committee, correspondence, Steering Committee/ Anne Routier (*National Party*), no date; L Maritz (Personal Collection), interview, T Prekel, 28 August 2001.

50 "NP neem weer deel aan vroue-koalisie", *Beeld*, 25 February 1994, p. 2; J Gowans, "Equality for women", *Sunday Tribune*, 6 March 1994, p 16.

51 MCH 100 4.1.1.23: Steering Committee, minutes, meeting, 21 March 1994.

Women's Charter could not only be completed in time, but was also not as comprehensive as was initially intended. That was a serious accusation that would not only jeopardise the credibility of the Women's Charter campaign, but could also be questioned by the donors.

In July 1993, during the second WNC National Council, leadership must have realised that the Women's Charter project was delayed. In her speech Frene Ginwala pointed out that the problems that arose during the negotiating process affected the WNC as well. She also mentioned the diversity of the coalition membership and that political differences made achieving consensus problematic and led to strained interpersonal relationships. She singled out the inability of officials to take responsibility and pointed out that they came from different organisations and that problems consequently arose from divided loyalties.⁵² When Debbie Budlender the Research Manager resigned in March 1993 she mentioned that the Coalition's decision-making process was "slow, inconclusive, lacking in openness and undemocratic in style".⁵³

The process of collecting demands for the Charter was initially to be undertaken by trained researchers as a participatory research project that would consult 1800 focus groups nationwide. Eventually due to time constraints it was reduced to around 200 focus groups and conducted by participating organisations. Another 50 groups were undertaken by a market research company.⁵⁴

Apart from the Women's Charter campaign being behind schedule and not as broad as was initially envisaged, there was also confusion about its direction, content and style. Until then it had been believed that, apart from its being incorporated into the interim constitution, it was also supposed to influence the negotiations.⁵⁵ The constitution of the WNC stipulated that it would be incorporated into the Bill for Human Rights of the final constitution.⁵⁶ Abrams suggests that the activists in the WNC – for example, the former United Democratic Front (UDF)-allied women – saw the Women's Charter campaign as an opportunity to educate women and above all to mobilise them so that women's voices could be heard. This group was sceptical about the effectiveness of legal changes. On the other hand, the more radical members,

52 MCH 100 3.1.5: National Council, minutes, council meeting, 11 July 1993.

53 MCH 100 6.3.1.7-8: National Working Committee, correspondence, D Budlender/ National Working Committee, 21 March 1993.

54 MCH 100 17.1.60 Research, progress report, 3 October 1993.

55 S Hassim, "A conspiracy of women..." *Social Research*, vol. 69, No. 3 (Fall 2002), pp. 710-711.

56 MCH 100 1.1 The constitution of the WNC, 6 February 1993.

especially those who had been in exile overseas, saw the Women's Charter as a link between women and the legislative process. They wanted to see it as part of the interim Constitution in the short term and eventually wanted it to be incorporated into the Charter for Human Rights of the new government.⁵⁷

The WNC's national conference on the Women's Charter took place from 25 to 27 February 1994. Delegates broke into groups to discuss both the status and the content of the Women's Charter. A few groups suggested that it could be used as a political document and that a special committee could turn it into a legal document, if necessary.⁵⁸ That never happened. No formal decision was taken on the Women's Charter. It is indeed strange that the main constitutional objective, one of the two main objectives of the WNC, was set aside. The reason for this is unclear. It is possible that so little time was left for the final negotiations that the position of a Women's Charter did not play a role. Another possibility is that the WNC lost its focus and momentum after the appointment of the political candidates and that these candidates lost interest. It would appear that early in 1994 there was a feeling that the Women's Charter merely had to be completed. Then at least something tangible could be shown to the donors. Eventually the final draft was put together in 48 hours by a mostly white team.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Diversity is both our weakness and our strength. This announcement by Ann Letsebe,⁶⁰ Co-convenor, was true for the Afrikaner women who represented Afrikaner women's organisations. Due to their lack of political expertise and the hostility they experienced from the black women, it was difficult to adjust to the WNC. It became even more difficult when the political events in the country had a direct influence on the WNC. The non-political image of the WNC was seriously jeopardised because the WNC did not exist 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 created even more division in the WNC.

57 SK Abrams, *Fighting for women's liberation during the liberation of South Africa: the Women's National Coalition* (unpublished M.A. thesis, Wadham College, Oxford, 2000), pp. 10-11.

58 SK Abrams, *Fighting for women's liberation during the liberation of South Africa*, pp. 95-96.

59 S Hassim, "A conspiracy of women...", *Social Research*, vol. 69, No. 3 (Fall 2002), pp. 711 and 726.

60 MCH 100 3.2.2: National Council, reports, General Secretary on Council meeting, July 10-11, 1993.

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. The WNC eventually fulfilled its mandate to complete the Charter, but the haste to complete it also put the end result under suspicion.

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.⁶¹ 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 for political objectives.

Frene Ginwala's injunction to the members of the WNC – "There also has to be a conspiracy of women"⁶² – was not feasible since the diversity of the women, in this case with respect to the differences in political ideologies, made this impossible. However, the political undertones were problematic for most Afrikaner women and many indicated this as the reason that they did not want to be involved. The question arises as to why it upset them to such a degree? Did they feel cheated as they unwittingly became part of the political game, since their mere presence gave legitimacy to the WNC? Alternatively, was it that the ANC alliance would be benefiting most from the political interference? These accusations are serious, because if the mere existence of the WNC gave the ANC a political advantage, it is only logical that other groups – in this case Afrikaner women – would not take the "official" objectives of the organisation seriously. It can be argued that this could have been the main reason why Afrikaner women in the WNC, during the critical period between

61 See source reference in the discussion, and especially the sources of the WNC as a party-political front.

62 MCH 100 15.1.5.6 National Workshop, speech by Frene Ginwala, 25-26 April 1992.

1991 and 1994, eventually remained largely uninvolved, stayed away and were left with a sense of disillusionment.

Appendix

Member organisations of the WNC⁶³

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

⁶³ *Breaking the silence*, an introduction to the Women's Charter for effective equality (Women's National Coalition, no date). List is not complete, but was the only official list provided by the WNC. Afrikaner women's organisations and organisations with Afrikaans speaking women that played a role in the WNC, are underlined by the researcher.

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
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

