

## SEXUAL ABUSE AND AGGRESSION AGAINST WOMEN

Lusaka, 1989

The subject under discussion is a controversial question because of conflicting interpretations and perceptions. Approaches differ from country to country, as well as within communities at different levels of socio-economic development. The paper will restrict itself to the South African experience with less reference to Africa and the world.

History records that society tends to relegate a woman to a home and a man to relating to the outside world. Few exceptions are noted and only with matrilineal communities. Consequently women engaged in public life were regarded as less feminine or an expression of sacrilege to tradition and custom. A woman was highly respected and she was inviolable - looked upon as bearer of new life and an essential component of a family unit and society in general. Despite the practice of polygamous marriage, a series of norms were entrenched within custom and tradition to safeguard the rights and obligations of women. The advent of social division into classes, especially with the emergence of capitalism and (in our case) colonialism, undermined the pre-colonial structure. Commodity relationship became dominant and hitherto insulation of women from ravages of survival gradually waned. Females were forced to enter the labour market in fields eradication considered male domain. On the other hand, society continued to regard them as inferior.

Sexual abuse or harassment cannot be given any one definition. It means different things itself in various ways/forms. Its most common feature - the 'dehumanising of women, making them insecure, incapable and perpetually dependent' - entails either physical or spiritual persecution, deliberately or as male action expressing social frustration and inadequacy. Researchers analyse the question from different angles guided by their fields of study. Within the South African liberation movement the question is brilliantly posed in the context of TRIPLE OPPRESSION - a concept which locates the source and nature of women's oppression, not exclusively within the family, but also in the socio-economic and political context within which the family is situated.

### Family Tradition and Social Practice in South Africa

Most marriages among the Africans, unless declared otherwise, are governed by customary law which regard a woman as a perpetual minor. She is condemned to attending to household chores especially in the rural areas. The truth is that she is supposed to ensure the up-bringing and welfare of the family while the husband had migrated to the cities. Much is written on the plight of rural and farm-female workers and child labour to warrant any repetition.

The determination of the family size is generally an exclusive prerogative of men, irrespective of wives feeling or state of health. Failure to reproduce "male progeny", considered guarantors to the continuity of the family lineage, is blamed on women but in actual biological fact, this depends on a male. The man and/or his family turn to ostracise her or encourage the husband to find an alternative. The trauma for the female is beyond description in such cases.

Social practice shuns child bearing out of wedlock and in most instances this results in criminal abortions. Where its possible, the mother of an unwanted child is left alone to fend for it and ensure its welfare. Public security and welfare for Blacks is almost non-existent in South Africa. In the event of proven sterility of women, men are generally given a social "green light" to be what one can term "potentially polygamous", that is, bearing children outside the family. In the case of women, its regarded as adultery.

### COMMON NORMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND AGGRESSION

**RAPE:** Women daily experience unwanted or unwarranted attention and approaches from men either in public or workplaces. The most atrocious experience is RAPE, characterized by some researchers as "symbol of coercive roots of the patriarchy and power which men have over women - the assumed right to depose of them as they wish". Rape has both psychological and physical negative effects on the victim, especially a virgin. This leads to phenomena like sexual phobia and lack of confidence in one-self. Rape becomes a stigma in so far as society is concerned. Public misconceptions, at times, advance notions like "uncontrollable passion."



The statistics of rape cases are shocking in South Africa. People opposed to Women Abuse (POWA), in an article dated 17-23.02.89, observed that "a woman is raped every eighth minute in South Africa". According to the National Institute for Crime Prevention (NICRO) there were 15 816 reported rapes in 1986 and 18 145 in 1987. Further research indicated that only one rape in twenty is reported, which means that the actual figure for 1988 was nearer 3 360 000 or nearly 1000 a day. POWA continued on to say that rape survivors have to contend with unsympathetic attitudes of the media, police, courts and, sometimes, medical practitioners. Black victims in particular of working class origin have an additional problem that their predicament is seen as being less serious than of their white counterparts.

Of late, rape cases within marriages have emerged before courts of law. In September 1987, Bloemfontein Magistrate found a man guilty of trying to rape his own wife. The case raised the question whether a husband has the right to "make love" to his partner against her will.

**MARITAL VIOLENCE:** Wife bashing is the most common form of violence within families. It is usually seen as essentially a private matter, both by men and women concerned and those outside the marriage. General causes are:-

- (a) Drunkenness;
- (b) Jealousy or mistrust by husband;
- (c) Over expectation over performance of roles;
- (d) One parting and going out without the other;
- (e) Sex and money;

If marital violence is seen as a private matter what are the implications for the parties concerned? At what point and at whose request is it appropriate for public agencies to intervene in the private world of the marriage? Is the female trapped? What about the effects over children who witness this daily?

These and others are questions which our conference will have to answer after evaluating concrete realities. To what extent is male violence a product of psychological factors, as opposed to being a product of social norms which condone and support it? Is our society failing in its upbringing of boys to inculcate the value of personal relationships and parenthood (marriage and family life)?

The attitude to this question in South Africa is vividly expressed in the **SPEAK** Magazine dated July/August 1988 in an article entitled "Breaking the Silence-Women Say Our Men Must Stop Beating US". Herein are excerpts from responses by both male and female:

....."It is clearly written..... tells exactly what women go through.....It is very strong and has ideas of what one can do..... what are you saying-I have seen so many women beating men and you say nothing about that.....these things should be discussed in the bedroom.....I do not believe it, but you are asking women to form vigilante groups!....."Most interesting are responses by two women:....."My child, this is normal in our lives. In our society it is a shame to think of separating from your husband. People seem to think there was something wrong with a woman. That is why most of us stand it." The other one said....."It's high time women must fight for their rights. If two people do not agree they must talk together. There is no need for beatings".

The UN Decade of Women, helped to draw public attention to the plight of women. A certain awareness was generated to both governmental and non-governmental organisations. Although constitutions of many countries guarantee basic equality regardless of sex or creed, there are no sufficient mechanisms to ensure implementation. It continues to be the responsibility of women to fight for their rights. A certain Regina Morantz correctly characterised a woman's status in society as follows: "A woman's image is riddled with contradictions, guardian of race but wholly subject to male authority, preserver of civilization, religion and culture, yet considered the intellectual inferior of men; the primary socializer, yet given no more real responsibility than a child herself".

#### WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION AND NATIONAL LIBERATION

The emancipation and equality of women within society is one of the pivotal tasks for National Liberation. The under utilisation and non-upgrading of women denies our society and broad National Liberation Movement and gives service to other people's struggles. However the question need not be raised in a divisive manner, it demands education of both men and society remains central in the development of a powerful women's movement addressing the various facets of abuse, sexism, oppression, aggression etc.



Research on these subjects should be an integral to the emancipation process and not only academic. Ntombi Hadebe, in a paper entitled "Women, education and emancipation", raises the following questions and suggestions:

- (a) how far has People's Education dealt with the issue of sexism, as experts are in a process of developing and producing alternative curricula?
- (b) (i) If the future government has a positive policy on the emancipation of women how do we guarantee its implementation?  
(ii) Our progressive organisations have that policy now, is it implemented fully and how?
- (c) Language, it is argued, has an impact in shaping and organising one's perception of the world. What effects do English nouns and pronouns for instance have on gender and sex roles especially with children.
- (d) (i) Is it advisable to integrate a women's-studies syllabus as part of the main school curriculum?  
(ii) At what academic level should it be introduced?

Response to these questions will contribute to our research for a solution to one of the immediate tasks confronting us. Pioneering attempts have begun in South Africa within progressive organisations and trade unions.

Rape Crisis offices are operational in almost all the major cities advising victims of rape and sexual abuse. The magazines, 'AGENDA' and 'SPEAK' are among promising initiatives to raise social awareness on the woman question. The contingent of delegates, directly from the country, would inform the conference on current initiatives.

The convening of the COSATU Women's Congress in 1988, enabled female workers to focus on their situation in workplaces and society. Major items on the agenda were Pregnancy, Health and Safety, Contraception and Abortion, Sexual Harassment, Child-care and Maternity, as well as Women and the family. These and other questions need serious attention in our mobilisation and organisational work.

#### OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS TO ALLEVIATE THE PROBLEM

1. Abused women need safe accommodation so that they are not forced to continue living with violent men. Equally to be assisted in beginning a new life with their children.
2. A better training for professionals involved in counselling victims [never to lose the humane approach].
3. A serious re-think of the notion of the family, i.e. responsibilities of partners in a union and the role of society and public agencies towards safe-guarding the family unit.
4. Bridging the gap between legislation and implementation; theory and practice, as well as consideration for children-violent fathers.

**MALIBONGWE !**



## WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

paper prepared by Rachel Celile, Maf Anderson and Rhoda Njanana

Harare, Zimbabwe,

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This paper will attempt to look, not only at the role of women in the media - their positions, problems, experiences and aspirations, but also at how women and women's issues are portrayed in firstly, the commercial media and secondly the alternative media in South Africa\*.

We have lived through 30 years where women's liberation has been a key issue. We have seen the United Nations' Women's Decade come and go and read about or attended functions to celebrate the International Year of the Woman and the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. In South Africa, as everywhere else, these have been identified by the media as milestones on the long road to Women's liberation, as has been the rise to power of various women-heads of state, in this decade.

Maggie Thatcher has long been a favourite in the South African media, as are many women who make it to the "top", be it of a country or a company.

But ordinary women mostly don't feature. Little or nothing is written about the millions living in the rural areas, or the millions of workers who go home to start a double shift as homemakers and housekeepers.

One could argue that the problem is one of a who-when-what-where-why focussed media - What progressive journalist on a commercial newspaper has not had features thrown back at her by an irate and reactionary news editor: "There's only so much you can write about the masses for Godssake. Princes are news. Politicians are news. Paupers are not news !

By the commercial / mainstream/conventional press we mean those publications owned and controlled by capitalist and allied interests. By the alternative press we mean a range of progressive publications currently produced by anti-apartheid individuals or community organisations, the labour movement and student groups, as well as clandestine publications of the national liberation movement.

The first category includes the English Language Press dominated by two conglomerates, the Times Media Limited (TML), formerly the South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN) and the Argus Groups; and the two Afrikaans Language Groups - Nasionale Pers and Perskor; both of which have traditionally had close links with the ruling Nationalist Party. Others in this category but not owned by the group include the pro-government Citizen, Ilanga (recently bought from the Argus company by Inkatha), and a host of magazines ranging from Scope, with its sex'n drugs'n rock'n roll sensationalism, to various women's magazines. We have here looked mainly at the print media because we feel TV, video and film should fall under a discussion on culture although again there may be casual references to visual media.



It is true that in the commercial press there is little place for developmental journalism. It is also true that in the commercial press in South Africa a death in detention that once rated a front page lead, now rates a statistic in a yearly overview of resistance politics. In such a society it is hard to examine, day after day or week after week, the conditions of women's lives; the on-going problems of child care (although it is not unusual to see articles on the especially gifted child, or the Down's syndrome child, or something that makes unusual reading); let alone to allow the newspaper to be used in some educative way.

So if we can expect none of this in the conventional media, what should we expect? Surely at the very least, in 1989, we do not expect to read articles or see photographs which are humiliating and offensive to women? It could be argued in the Black commercial press like the Sowetan, and City Press, that there are not enough women to fight these issues. The Media Workers Association of South Africa (MWASA), to which most black media workers belong, reports a female membership of only about six percent. Of these, the majority are reporters. There are virtually no sub-editors and news editors. On the commercial newspapers there are no women editors.

It is also rare to find a Black woman editing a magazine. Maud Mutanyane, Editor of the magazine, Tribute, worked for a decade on newspapers, first the Argus, then the Star and later the Post. She left the newspaper world because although she was more capable than most men, her colour and sex always stood in the way of her getting a senior position. Having become used to hard work she was forced within the prejudiced newspaper environment, to work twice as hard as her White counterparts and also her male counterparts to prove her potential. Maud beavered away as a reporter on "Tribute" and in a remarkably short time took over the editorship. Old habits die hard, and many media people could not get used to the idea of having a woman editor. To date she is called 'Mr Editor'. She recalls the incredulity with which her first editorial was greeted, some people claimed the article had been written by someone else.

Maud has made it a tradition to give coverage to women and women's issues - unwanted pregnancies, post-natal depression, women and education, profiles of women activists and so on. "I have been accused of promoting feminism, but this does not stop me at all and will not stop me publishing articles on women" she says.

She would like to see a Women's Media Association and decries the jealousies and competitiveness among women journalists that stop them from organising themselves. On those newspapers aimed at a White readership, there are plenty of White media-women. President of the South African Society of Journalists (SASJ), Pat Sidley, gives SASJ membership figures as women to women. The joke among White male journalists is that journalism is becoming a woman's profession "because the pay is so bad".

So why do these numbers of White women allow the back-page girl in the Sunday Times, the Saturday 'Sizzler' in the Pretoria news, the weekly pin-up in Scope, to name a few of the regular "tits'n bums" (as they are crudely called in the trade) photo slots? Why do women's by-lines so often appear above the endless articles on beauty-contests and stories on the search for the loveliest legs in the land?



The answer lies partly in fear. For many women, the prospect of challenging a macho newsroom is very daunting and many fear their job would be jeopardised if they took on the status quo.

Then there is the question of organisation on individual publications - there are often too few to take up these issues collectively. Even where there are sufficient numbers of women they are usually not organised and sadly, often do not really care. 'The atmosphere on commercial publications is highly competitive. Each individual is out to become famous and on the mainstream media, many journalists actually pride themselves on not getting involved with issues, always being distanced from organisations, and hence retaining their "objectivity and journalistic integrity".

A pity there is no time here to explore just how this "objectivity" serves the interest of the regime. "Objectivity in the South African, media means a word like 'terrorist' will be used instead of 'patriot' or 'freedom fighter'. It means equal treatment in the copy, of, on the one hand, an organisation supported by the majority of the South Africans, like the ANC, and on the other the minority white neo-nazi AWB. It means working within a framework of press-gags and state reprisals against those brave journalists who do try to reflect accurately the on-going horrors of apartheid.

Within this context the woman who usually wishes to make it, which is usually the motivation on this type of media, is unlikely to 'rock the boat'.

There are several stereotypes of the White South African woman journalist: the hardened newswoman - chain-smoking and tough as nails who can write any of her colleagues under the table and drink them there too; or the fashionable and pretty woman's editor who writes articles about how 'yukky' it is that women have stopped shaving their armpits; or the cub reporter endlessly frustrated by the injustices she witnesses on a daily basis in court and by the way her copy is snubbed to exclude anything broaching sympathy for the rape witness, and who she complains is taken off the courts for a day and sent to write a caption for a picture of a dog show.

While there are obviously some women media workers like this, it is equally true that there are many women who have tried to work progressively within the commercial media, who have through sheer skill and commitment managed to get story after story past cynical news editors about on-going detentions and trials, there have been very brave women who have written about police brutality and torture in detention and have stood up to incredible harassment from the security forces in order to protect their sources.

Although there are increasingly large numbers of white women journalists, there are very few subs and news editors and only a handful of woman's magazine editors. These do take up discrimination but only where it affects women of a certain class, women executives, professional women and so on - hence the label 'Fairlady feminists' which is often applied to middle-class women who grouch about unequal pay.

And within the conventional media the real power does not even lie with the editors, but with a



management cautious about protecting its business or political interests. Two years ago Fair Lady's Editor Dene Smuts and Erica Platter, the Assistant Editor resigned after Nasionale Pers suppressed the publication of an interview with Dennis Worrall. The Managing Director for Nasionale Pers said it was the policy of Nasionale Pers that party-political controversy should be avoided in the columns of its consumer magazines. Several years ago a consumer journalist on the star was prevented from following up a story about the Nestle Baby milk scandal and its implication for rural mothers because it would affect advertising. In 1979, a story about smoking and women's health written for a magazine section of the Sunday times was scrapped because Anton Rupert the cigarette mogul always takes the large front page advertisement on the magazine.

The 'fairlady feminist' perspective on the one hand, and the glib tongue in the cheek 'women's libber', type articles on the other are probably the only way most South African mainstream media would consider running articles to examine just why, in the first place women are oppressed.

Most commercial South African newspapers are still in the dark when it comes to the "women's pages"(and why separate women's pages are needed at all is also an issue - surely items relating to women could be woven throughout the paper). Articles on methods of waxing legs, expensive new face products, cakes to make for husbands at home - these do not represent the needs and demands of women. There is no attempt by the majority of these publications to discuss the social and economic reality of the mass of women in the country. There is seldom an article written about the conditions of women in the rural areas, about the daily experiences and hardships of the millions of women workers in Apartheid South Africa. The few articles that have appeared about the abuse sexually at work are often accompanied by silly headlines or humorous drawings of say a rolling-eyed wolf patting the bottom of a busty blonde and a headline like 'How to cope with the Office Wolf' which is aimed at not offending men and simply reinforces many people's prejudices that it's all quite normal and healthy and fullblooded to be pawed at work. Articles like this almost never say: "If this is happening to you and you need support get in touch with such and such an organisation. Expose the person doing this to you. Maybe others are suffering like you."

To date many rape cases in many a commercial newspapers are reported in lascivious terms. Unnecessary details of the women's clothing are often given, implying she was asking for it.

Gossip columns and letters pages as seen by some editors as the preserve of some women but these often feature inverted trigger letters, to bring out a flood of letters on a particular subject, or spurious advice. Dear Danisile, an advice column in the Sunday Times Extra (the black readership edition) was written for several years by a White British woman, Veronica Potter, although to her credit she tried to give sound advice, the problems of Black South African Women under the triple oppression created by apartheid cannot be solved by a white liberal and there were frequently glaring cultural and political gaffes in her responses, not that the cynical editors would have cared.

#### THE ROLE OF SABC

According to the Sunday Star, surveys have shown that the SABC TV was "the most important source of information for 59 percent of whites and 44 percent of blacks" in 1987/88.



These are very terrifying figures which when one considers that the SABC is the major vehicle of Apartheid propaganda, that its "moral" and political content is controlled by a neo-nazi organisation, the Broederbond, and that its outlook on women is Calvinist in the extreme.

When one considers that in South Africa most women are left in the reserves while their husbands go to work in the mines or towns, that most of these women cannot read or write, that most of these women never see newspapers, that most of these women keep in touch with the urban areas through their radios, then the role played by SABC-Radio is equally frightening.

SABC-Radio leaves no holds barred in its efforts to instill an ethnic consciousness into the minds of its listeners, to create a passive listenership and on its women's programmes a sense of fuss and dazzle - interviews with famous people, achievers, stars! - that has little to do with reality and can only serve to alienate women still further.

## PART 2 - WOMEN IN THE ALTERNATIVE MEDIA IN SOUTH AFRICA

Altogether 11 publications were systematically examined for this paper. Of these, three (Speak, Sash and Voice of Women) are specifically run for and by women. Another three are weekly alternative commercial newspapers (Weekly Mail, South and New Nation), while three are progressive magazines aimed at different readerships, but all nevertheless following a similar formula (New Era, Learn and Teach and Upbeat). Other publications were also looked at for this paper, but not issue by issue over a period of a year which is what we did with the others where these were in print. Among other publications consulted were Work In Progress, Saamstaan, Out of Step, Wits Student, Agenda and Grassroots. All of the publications have a progressive outlook towards women's issues. None uses sexist terminology, none features women as sex objects, all have a reasonable number of women on their staff (obviously the first three and Agenda have an all-women staff) so we are not concerned here with the glaring instances of sexism in the conventional media or the discrimination in terms of pay described earlier. We are more concerned with content and form of the alternative media. What women's issues does the "alternative" media address? Are they presented in an appealing way?

In terms of physical lay-out of most of the women's publications, probably Speak is the most appealing and Voice of Women the least. In terms of content, all of the publications have articles of interest to a broad section of women, although Speak once again probably tops the lot in terms of easy-read appeal, plus the most down-to-earth content. The August to October 1987 (No. 16) issue carries a long article on domestic workers organising themselves into the COSATU affiliated South African Domestic Workers' Union (SADWU), which is of interest to the 800 000 women who are domestic workers in South Africa. Although the formation of SADWU was covered by most alternative media, Speak's approach was exceptional.

Speak contains a regular section called "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow", which looks at the women's



struggle in other parts of the world - protest against strip searches in Northern Ireland, brothels for young girls in Taiwan, the role of women in the Cuban revolution, the 1000 women in Patna, India marching in the streets: "We women are not flowers, we are sparks, whoever clashes with us will be broken into pieces."

Sounds familiar? The bell it rings in my mind is the "you have touched the women, you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder, you will be crushed" a cry from August 1956. And of course, *Speak* deals very well with the early women's history and moves from there to present-day organisation. Nor does it shirk the issue of gender, which so often gets a back seat in the liberation agenda.

In reporting on the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA)'s Women's Rights Workshop, it raises clearly the issue of women's triple oppression. Black women in South Africa are oppressed not just as black people, but as workers and women too. Most women work a full day and then go home to their unpaid double shift. In the streets, at home, travelling to work and in the workplace itself, "we are raped, assaulted and treated as sex objects".

It looks too at issues which are quite taboo in most progressive publications - rape in marriage, beatings by men, but never in a passive way. It suggests help from organisations like Rape Crisis and POWA (People Opposed to Women Abuse) and suggests ways in which women can unite to fight these problems. For example, it mentions that in Peru women carry whistles, and when one woman gets beaten she blows the whistle and others in the community come to her rescue.

The publication contains a good mix of articles on women's organisation, it promotes culture by women (e.g. articles on Miriam Makeba, poetry written by readers, etc.), a section on child's play, women's health issues - e.g. the dangers of skin lightening creams, an excellent series on being pregnant, how to prepare for labour, what can go wrong, and so on-

It has a unique way of looking at national issues from a women's point of view. For example an article on Resettlement in No. 21, Sept-Nov 1988, comments: "Very often it is the women who have to rebuild homes, because the men have jobs in faraway towns. It is the women who have to search for wood and water in these 'resettlement' camps. This is a big battle when there is not much water or wood. They have to try to get their food for their families and they watch their babies die."

It runs stories by famous women activists that most people would probably not otherwise get a chance to read in South Africa, like "Sisters" by Alexandra Kollontai.

The photographs depict women as militants, as mothers playing with children, as people having fun singing and dancing. They show women carrying wood, celebrating Women's Day and organising. A far cry from the way women are depicted in the commercial press.

*Sash* and *Agenda* also carry articles addressing some of these issues but their readership is obviously different and the language just a bit too inaccessible for popular appeal. *Agenda*, which concentrates on gender issues and organisation, is clearly aimed at an intellectual readership while *Sash* is really just an in-house journal for its liberal and progressive White membership although it carries excellent articles on



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issues like White women and militarisation, discussions about the role of the Five Freedoms Forum, streetwalkers, rural workers, and many others about on-going national issues.

Voice of Women, although it carries articles of great interest to activists, and above all urges organisational commitment, continues to suffer from unappealing lay-out and lack of photographs. For some reason it does not address issues of gender or women's health. Are readers expected to believe there are no instances of sexism in the ANC? Do women not suffer from cystitis and are babies not born in exile? Wouldn't it be more realistic and interesting to have the occasional question like: "why have you never married?" or "how do you manage to combine your work as a guerrilla with being a mother?" put to some of the women interviewed. At least more ordinary women would be able to relate then to the very political statements being made by the women in VOW.

Of the three newspapers perhaps the one with the most awareness about women is South. Where New Nation and Weekly mail report on detainees and those on death row, South comes in from a very fresh angle with interviews of mothers of activists, much more focus on people's families and communities. It frequently runs features which have no apparent newsworthiness - like the one on strollers, street girls and a haven built for them (Dec 8-14, 1988) - but which do take up women's issues - the question of women priests, nurses' pay and working conditions. It frequently interviews women activists and organisers when they could have got interviews with their more senior, male counterparts. Interviews with lesser known women poets and singers are also common. News stories are often ones that could be ignored in other large commercial newspapers. Aug 8 - 24, 1988 issue carried as hard news the story of the Women in Langa facing eviction from their homes because they couldn't afford the rent, who were told by a Cape Provincial Administration official to "sell their bodies" at the men's hostel to get rent.

New Nation and Weekly Mail tend to focus on the better known figures who are so often male, and neither appears to have a policy of positive reinforcement towards women although there is clearly one of non-sexism and non-discrimination. New Nation does to its credit, have a very good series called "Know your body" and Weekly Mail recently carried an exceptional article on four women in balaclavas who shot at men in a shebeen in retribution for a gang rape. The article could have been made sensational an all-woman hit squad is not a common occurrence but the article was beautifully handled by Thandeka Gqubule, who had as her introduction not a Sunday Times style 'Annie get your gun type' of approach but- a woman is raped every eight minutes in South Africa, according to People opposed to women abuse (POWA)"..... The article explores how women with little protection in law are resorting to their own form of violence. It looks at what POWA is doing, plus a range of other women's organisations and ways in which women in various communities have mobilised against rape. This is progressive journalism, exactly the kind of reporting we like to see. (Weekly Mail Feb 17 to Feb 23, 1989)

On the TV front there is as yet no commercial alternative to SATV, except for M-Net (the Electronic Media Network), an independent privately owned pay television which shows only entertainment films. On the alternative side there are a number of women involved in filming videos for international news networks. Elaine Proctor should be noted for "the Sharpsville Spirit", a documentary which examined the different effects of protest on the Sharpsville community in 1961 and 1984, and the Ribbon about the Black Sash.



Again there are no alternatives to radio that operate from within South Africa, although the ANC's Radio freedom beams to the whole region including South Africa daily from Ethiopia, Zambia, Tanzania, Madagascar and Angola.

Yet women broadcasters on Radio Freedom feel women's issues are not given enough air time. Rachel Celile, a former broadcaster on Radio Freedom (Tanzania), says that only once a week was the daily 15 minute programme aimed at women "and then it was usually specific issues that had come up at the time - for example how mothers were harassed during the school's boycotts.

"But I wrote about women because I was there. If I hadn't been there the subject would have been ignored".

This view is confirmed by another woman broadcaster, Karabo More, who spent four years with Radio Freedom in Lusaka. There too the women's programme was given once a week-slot, this time for 30 minutes, but in this case there were several women in a committee to research and write articles. Topics mostly included a lot on evictions, how they affect women, profiles of various women, items on conditions of women in rural areas, also a series on Depo Provera. According to Karabo, there is no women's programmes on the Radio Freedom that broadcasts from Ethiopia and Madagascar.

In trying to analyse the mass of problems facing (a) women media workers and (b) portrayal of women in the media, it seems there are numerous problems that have to be tackled:-

- \* shortage of black media workers and lack of skills. This comes from a poor education, problems in writing, expression etc; lack of opportunities for women to learn skills, or upgrade existing skills socialisation that certain media fields i.e. the technical side - layout, news editing, editing of tape for the radio - are traditionally men's fields.
- \* the alternative media and occasionally the commercial media tends to carry a lot on women that is descriptive in terms of explaining aspects of women's oppression etc, but not giving answers to women's economic, social and political problems.
- \* the commercial media often adds to the problem of underdevelopment of women's consciousness through the garbage it prints on a daily basis.
- \* because women in the media are not organised as a cohesive whole there is nobody to stand together to argue about sexist advertisements or behavior.
- \* it is largely because of the lack of technical control over publications, radio stations and so on, that women do not have the confidence to be able to say: "No, we don't want that article or that photograph", and know it will not jeopardize their jobs.
- \* the problems of underdevelopment of women cannot be divorced from their social and economic



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conditions. Hence it is impossible to look at women's emancipation in South Africa without seeing it within the Apartheid context.

There needs to be:-

1. Continuous recruitment of women in the field of communications, media work, at various levels and in sufficient numbers. This is something that could be done within the country by media workers in the alternative press. At present a scheme is being mooted to launch a Centre for Applied Media Studies at the University of Witwatersrand. It is very much in the air at this point, and preliminary discussions are taking place between Wits University, progressive alternative press, media managers and the Canadian Government. If it works out, the centre will have on-going training programmes oriented to specific jobs, and very practical in nature.

Noting that Black women in particular have not had the education or the opportunity to obtain media skills, it is advisable that centres such as this one practise affirmative action and accept as many Black women as possible on to their courses.

Outside the country South African media women in exile could also surely have short crash courses to upgrade their skills in all aspects of media work: reporting, typing, using computers and modems, radio broadcasting and so on.

2. Organised women's collectives on all commercial publications and media. These could refuse to touch copy or photographs humiliating to women and could pressurise for the removal of articles aimed exclusively at, say white middle-class women in a publication with a wider readership.

3. Alternative radio stations and progressive programs for women which can reach women all over the place. Radio media workers have the potential to the development of women socially, educationally, politically and culturally. They have the potential to help forge women's organisations and to stop the isolation of women in rural areas. Women should be able to view such radio programmes as "our own" so that nothing of consequence in a community will not be related to the media workers. There must be dynamic contact between media workers and the community.

4. Rural newspapers should also be developed for those few women who can read, again not just for the purpose of spreading information but also for educational purposes. Publications like this can help to promote literacy. Their content should cover women's affairs and issues that affect them such as health, production, agricultural methods, nutrition, child-care, jobs, education, training and many related issues. A dialogue, or letter pages could also be started, to keep women in touch with one another and to stop them from feeling isolated. Bearing in mind the different languages spoken in South Africa's rural areas, the media aimed at rural women must use a language they understand.

5. The alternative media must be answerable to the communities it serves.

6. Special attention should be paid to youth publications. The question of discrimination against women



should be raised and tackled so that youth can grow up with an understanding of the issues of women's oppression and a determination - in both sexes to fight it .

7. Women generally need to become more independent and assertive and find ways to do traditionally male media tasks. Where a single person might, because of socialisation find the prospect of editorship of a publication daunting, and doubt her own ability to do a good job, an editorial collective or a joint editorship with another woman would not be as frightening .

Progressive publications, in dealing with various problems faced by women e.g. rape, should attempt to solve some of these problems-e.g. suggesting organisations that the women can go to for help. It is not enough merely to describe a problem, and to show oppression. There must also be attempts to show how women are trying to organise themselves to resist such treatment.

9. Since there can be no true liberation without women's liberation, let us ensure that all of us who consider ourselves to be revolutionaries will keep the women's struggle high up on the liberation agenda. We realise that in the case of South Africa there are certain objective conditions that will slow down the pace of women's emancipation. Nevertheless let us agree that women's liberation is not a post independence issue; we must start seeing our emancipation as part and parcel of the national democratic revolution.

MALIBONGWE