

"HISTORY AND OUR CHILDREN WILL DEFEND US": MOTHERISM,
CHRISTIANITY AND THE GENDERED INTERPRETATION OF POLITICAL
MORALITY BY THE BLACK SASH OF SOUTH AFRICA, 1955-1959

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“History and Our Children Will Defend Us”: Motherism, Christianity and the Gendered
Interpretation of Political Morality by the Black Sash of South Africa, 1955-1959

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to the memory of my mothers, Loma Catherine Leeds and Marian Arias Cywinski whose lives of courage removed boulders and crossed rivers in their own communities, and to my daughter Mary Catherine Cywinski in the hopes that she will follow in the tradition of her grandmothers.

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List of Abbreviations and Symbols

ACVV	<i>Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging</i>
ANC	African National Congress
ANCWL	African National Congress Women's League
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth League
C.A.T.A.P.A.W.	Cape Association for the Abolition of Passes for African Women
CLPP	Coloured Labour Preference Policy
COD	Congress of Democrats
FEDSAW	Federation of South African Women (1987)
FSAW	Federation of South African Women (1954)
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
NAD	Native Affairs Department
NLAA	Native Laws Amendment Act
NP	National Party
SAAU	South African Agricultural Union
SABRA	South African Bureau of Racial Affairs
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SANNC	South African Native's National Congress
SAP	South African Party
UP	United South African National Party/ United Party
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
ULPP	Urban Labour Preference Policy
WCTU	Women's Christian Temperance Union
WEAU	Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union of South Africa

ABSTRACT

**“HISTORY AND OUR CHILDREN WILL DEFEND US”: MOTHERISMS,
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This thesis seeks to expand existing scholarship by examining the notion of political morality articulated by the Black Sash between 1955 and 1959 as a gendered adaptation of South African liberalism which was animated by motherisms and influenced by Christianity. As the white women of the Black Sash scrutinized the political and social structures of apartheid through the lens of political morality they were confronted by the contradictions between political morality and the system of white supremacy which apartheid was designed to maintain. Refusing to compromise the principles of political morality, the Black Sash adopted multiple strategies of resistance to the racialized patriarchy of the white state. Motherisms provided a crucial platform on which the Black Sash formed alliances with African women to resist the racialized patriarchy of apartheid which viewed white women as having no role in public political discourse and black women as the superfluous appendages of black men. Internal

tensions arose within the Black Sash over whether they should focus exclusively on educating the white electorate or on opposing specific unjust laws directed at black South Africans. However, inter-racial alliances and practical resistance to apartheid were crucial strategies adopted by the Black Sash which enabled some white women to shed privileged perspectives and cross racial divides.

1. Introduction

“I come before you as a South African Woman and a Mother...”

Early in the morning on 25 May, 1955, white women began gathering at the Scottish War Memorial in Johannesburg. At the appointed time, some two thousand women, dressed impeccably in suits, hats, gloves, and heels, walked in quiet dignity to City Hall, accompanied by the beat of a muffled drum. Some of the marchers held aloft banners which read “Women Defend Your Children’s Future” in both English and Afrikaans. The women who marched called themselves “The Women’s Defense of the Constitution League” (League). News of their march was reported in the newspapers and their call to voters to protest the Senate Act had been handed out in the street the previous day. It was the middle of the work week and a diverse crowd of stunned observers lined the streets to watch the march. Such a large group of middle-class white women had never before engaged in concerted public political protest. Upon reaching City Hall they joined sixteen thousand other men and women to affirm the resolution: “Withdraw the Senate Act”.¹ The first manifesto of the League calling on all English and Afrikaans-

¹ Mirabel Rogers, *The Black Sash* (Johannesburg: Rotonews, 1956) 16-17. According to Jeremy Krikler, white women participated alongside men in the 1922 Miner’s Strike and Rand Revolt. See Jeremy Krikler, “Women, Violence and the Rand Revolt of 1922,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 22, no.3 (September 1996):349-372. What differentiated the Johannesburg march of the Women’s Defense of the Constitution League in May, 1955 was the middle-class status of the marchers in 1955 and the insistence by the women that they march as a separate entity from other protesters.

speaking women to unite in defense of the constitution was passed among the assembled crowd and appeared in the press on 25 May.² The manifesto read:

The time has come for the Government to listen to the voice of the women of this country.

We are the ones who have borne the children of today who are the South Africans of tomorrow, and who will have to bear the brunt of the sins of their fathers.

We cannot stand by doing nothing.

This government has stated that it will listen to no protests. As mothers and grandmothers, as wives and sweethearts, career women and professional women, as young women looking forward to a peaceful South Africa, we are uniting to take common action.

As women we intend to bring this Government to its senses. We therefore call on all women, English or Afrikaans-speaking to join this march.

Let all women who value liberty and freedom heed this call to action.³

In a speech following the demonstration at City Hall, Mrs. Agnes Winifred Hoernle, a respected anthropologist and past President of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), spoke as a woman and a mother.⁴ “I come before you,” she said, “representing no political party... I come before you as a South African woman and

² The League’s first manifesto was directed at white women voters. Black women could not vote until 1994.

³ Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, Manifesto, 25 May 1955, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1, Center for Research Libraries, Chicago.

⁴ A.W. Hoernle, “An Appeal to the People of South Africa” (speech, Johannesburg, South Africa, 25 May, 1955). Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

a mother, whose family has long been established in this land.”⁵ Mrs. Hoernle then explained why she believed that the Senate Act violated principles of democracy, equality before the law, and justice—ideals upon which the Black Sash notion of “Political Morality” was founded. Mrs. Hoernle observed that the South African Constitution protected the parliamentary rights of “the ‘non-European peoples’ in the Cape Colony” and the “equal rights of the English language” by requiring “overwhelming evidence” that the people of South Africa consented to change these protections. According to the Constitution, only a two-thirds majority vote in both houses of Parliament provided such “overwhelming evidence” of the people’s will. “How can votes, cast by members appointed by the government in power for the specific purpose of obtaining a two-thirds majority, provide any evidence of such overwhelming demand?” she wondered. Then she asked rhetorically, “How can any mothers think happily of the future of their children, when everything points to one section of the

⁵ Hoernle, “An Appeal to the People of South Africa,” Black Sash Society Papers. Agnes Winifred Hoernle is remembered as the “Mother of Social Anthropology in South Africa.” She was educated at Cambridge and read sociology at the Sorbonne with Emile Durkheim. She is credited with original and influential anthropological work on the Nama Khoikhoi people and was a Senior Lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand from 1923-1938. She left the university to pursue work in race relations, education and child welfare. She was President of the South African Institute of Race Relations from 1948-1950 and from 1953-54. Although she supported the creation of African reserves early in her career because she feared that there would be no land left for the “natives” to own, she later repudiated the reserve system because of its effect on the African peasantry. She is mostly remembered as the “wife” of Alfred Hoernle, whose views of African society she apparently did not share. Peter Carstens, “Agnes Winifred Hoernle (1885-1960): The Mother of Social Anthropology in South Africa,” *Sociology Today* 1, no. 6 (December 1985): 17-18. Paul Rich suggests that Alfred Hoernle’s liberalism was shaped by the concept of culture as “static” as a result of his wife’s work in anthropology. See, Paul Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Consciousness: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism, 1921-60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 61, 154n 58. However, when Mrs. Hoernle addressed the South African Association for the Advancement of Science in 1933 she told the assembly, “To find [the] laws of culture-change is the most novel and the most important problem which has emerged over the Social Anthropologist’s horizon....” (Carstens, 18). These remarks indicate that she did not, in 1933 at least, view culture as static. See also, A. Winifred Hoernle, “The Social Organization of the Nama Hottentots of Southwest Africa,” *American Anthropologist* 27, no. 1 (Jan-Mar. 1925): 1-24.

Afrikaans population arrogating to itself overwhelming power to mould South Africa to its particular liking, irrespective of the ideals and wishes of the other sections of the Afrikaans and English speaking peoples, not to speak of the millions of non-Europeans." She concluded with an impassioned plea, "There is no stronger bond for any nation than in carrying out its moral obligations. May justice prevail over empty legalism! For a sovereignty of justice is greater than a sovereignty of law."⁶

The Row Over the Senate Act

The women who marched on 25 May along with the rest of the assembled crowd had been spurred to action following the publication in the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* on 15 May, of an analysis of the Senate Act by Professor Arthur Keppel-Jones.⁷ The act had been introduced on 11 May by the National Party Minister of the Interior, Dr. Donges. At first, it received little attention. It was characterized by Mr. Strijdom, the current Prime Minister, as a "harmless alteration to a harmless body in order to achieve a limited objective—the removal of the Coloured voter from the common roll".⁸ The

⁶ A.W. Hoernle, *An Appeal to the People of South Africa*, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁷ Rogers, 13.

⁸ Cherry Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 32. The term "Coloured" referred to people of "mixed race" as designated under the Population Registration Act of 1950. This act established the mechanisms by which all South Africans would be assigned and registered according to race under apartheid. Deborah Posel, "Race as Common Sense: Racial Classification in Twentieth Century South Africa," *African Studies Review* 44, no. 2 (September 2001): 89. However, the legislative use of this term goes much further back to 1828 and Ordinance 50 which provided certain rights to "Free Persons of Colour." Timothy Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996) 104-105; John Edwin Mason, *Social Death and Resurrection* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003) 275-276. Thus, despite the onerous application of the Population Registration Act of 1950, the determination of rights based on racial category among the peoples of South Africa had a long history under British colonial rule. In this paper I use the term "Coloured" only when appropriate to describe people of mixed-race classified as "Colored" under the Population Registration Act of 1950. I use the term "African" to refer to people classified as "Bantu" under that act. When referring generally to people who were not classified as "white" under the Population Registration Act, I use the term, "black." I use the terms "white" or "European" to refer to the people so identified under that act.

National Party first attempted to disenfranchise qualified classified Coloured voters by introducing the Separate Representation of Voters Act in 1951. It aroused strong United Party opposition and did not garner the two-thirds majority required to pass. The government declared that it was law anyway, arguing that the South African Constitution did not have the power to “usurp” the legislative supremacy of parliamentary power. South Africa’s highest court, the Appellate Division, rejected these arguments and declared the Separate Representation of Voters Act unconstitutional in a unanimous opinion.⁹ The NP bid to break the stalemate was the Quorum Act and the Senate Act which significantly increased the number of NP members in both the Appellate Division and the Senate and required only a simple majority to pass.¹⁰ However, Leo Lovell, Labour M.P. from the Benoni District outside Johannesburg gave a speech in Parliament which questioned the purpose and effect of the Senate Act and attracted the attention of Professor Keppel-Jones.¹¹ As Keppel-Jones’s analysis pointed out, the act would enlarge the Senate from 48 to 89 members.¹² The so-called “harmless alteration” enabled the

⁹ The government next sought to nullify the decision of the Appellate Division through the High Court of Parliament Act in 1952. This act gave the High Court of Parliament, a special committee composed entirely of National Party M.P.’s, authority to repeal any judgment of the Appellate Division that invalidated any act of parliament. True to its mandate, the High Court of Parliament sitting in Pretoria, reversed the judgment of the Appellate Division and declared the Separate Representation of Voters Act valid. However, meeting at the same time as the High Court of Parliament, the Cape Supreme Court, declared the Separate Representation of Voters Act invalid, and this decision was upheld by the Appellate Division leading to a constitutional stalemate. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 30-31.

¹⁰ Michelman, 31.

¹¹ Rogers, 12-13. According to Rogers, the first M.P. to recognize the potential threat to the South African Constitution posed by the Senate Act was Norman Eaton of Durban. However, his speech before Parliament had failed to attract attention.

¹² Ben Beinart, “The South African Senate,” *The Modern Law Review* 20, no. 6 (November, 1957): 562. The act eliminated equal provincial representation and proportional representation. It also reduced terms from seven to five years, making the Senate more readily subject to dissolution by the government in power. Further, if the Senate failed to pass a bill passed by the Assembly after two successive sessions, the bill was to be presented to the Governor-General for assent and would become an Act of Parliament without approval of the Senate. (560-561).

National Party (NP) to achieve a two-thirds majority in parliament through government appointments rather than election by the voters.¹³ Effectively, this super-majority gave the National Party government the power to block any legislation that did not conform to the Nationalist agenda, overturn either of the two entrenched clauses of the South African Constitution, and perhaps made it impossible for the electorate to turn the NP out of office. Thus, Professor Keppel-Jones dramatically characterized the Senate Act as, “the decisive measure which takes away from the electorate the essential power that distinguishes democracy from dictatorship... [marking] the twilight of parliamentary government in South Africa.”¹⁴

The Johannesburg march of the Women’s Defense of the Constitution League was organized by six women and led by Ruth Foley who invited several influential women to tea on 19 May to discuss the implications of the Senate Act. Jean Sinclair, a Johannesburg City Councillor was among the invited guests.¹⁵ Mrs. Foley voiced the concerns of her guests when she told them, “We can’t sit still and do nothing—I don’t know what we *can* do, but we must do it. We must act. There must be thousands like us and we must get together.”¹⁶ Jean Sinclair suggested a women’s petition to the Mayor of

¹³ The Senate Bill permitted the government to appoint a total of 77 Senators: Beinart, 561.

¹⁴ Quoted in Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 13. In 1936 Africans were removed from the common roll. African men were limited to voting on a separate roll for white M.P.’s as African representatives in Parliament. Although the stated purpose of the Senate Act was to enable the NP to garner sufficient votes to eliminate the franchise for Coloured voters, Dr. Keppel-Jones also feared the threat to democratic rule among white voters because the new Senate gave the Nationalist government a majority well out of proportion to its seats in the House of Assembly. The NP had a majority of 12 seats in the House of Assembly in 1955. Under the Senate Act, this rather small majority gave the NP the ability to appoint 77 Senators as compared to 8 United Party Senators and 4 Senators who represented the interests of Africans. Beinart, “The South African Senate,” 562.

¹⁵ Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 13. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 10, 33-34. The other attendees were Jean Bosazza, Helen Newton Thompson, Tertius Pybus, and Elizabeth McLaren.

¹⁶ Rogers, 14.

Johannesburg to be followed up with a march.¹⁷ The initial petition and the march were planned and publicized through a phone tree system in which women called their friends, invited them to a meeting in Jean Sinclair's home, and asked them to invite others.¹⁸ The women who attended tea at Mrs. Foley's house along with several others formed the Johannesburg Special Committee of the League which planned and ran the day to day operations of the League during most of its first year.¹⁹

“We are the ones who have borne the children . . . who will have to bear the brunt of the sins of their fathers”: Political Morality, Motherisms and Christianity

The call to all English- and Afrikaans-speaking women to join the movement—“to bring the government to its senses”—in the League's first manifesto, reflected the League's initial focus on constitutional issues important to European voters.²⁰ The constitutional threat posed by the Senate Act occupied the League's attention throughout 1955. Once it became clear that the women's protest against the Senate Act would fail, leaders of the League broadened their focus to the link between democracy, individual liberty and equality before the law, and began to fashion a notion of “political morality.”²¹ The manifesto and Mrs. Hoernle's speech connected the nation's moral

¹⁷ Mrs. Sinclair explained that local ordinance permitted citizens to petition the Mayor to hold a public meeting over concerns related to national legislation. Ibid.

¹⁸ At the meeting the women learned that they were not alone, 31 professors at Rhodes University had issued a statement protesting the Senate Act. Rogers, 15.

¹⁹ Women's Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of Committee Meeting, 20 July, 1955. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

²⁰ After the Senate Act became law, the Black Sash issued several statements connecting the immorality of the Senate Act to the immorality of Apartheid generally. See for example, The Black Sash, “The Link Between the Immorality of the Senate Act and Our Defense of Civil Liberties,” appended to Minutes of A Special Meeting, 2 December, 1956. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

²¹ Jean Sinclair, “Statement on Policy of the Black Sash,” (Speech, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 March, 1956). Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

obligation to democracy and justice with a mother's obligation to her children's future well being. The warning in the League's manifesto that the South Africans of tomorrow will have to "bear the brunt of the sins of their fathers," entwined mothers as the keepers of morality to a prophetic message which was situated within diverse traditions of South African Christians. In April 1956, League members adopted "political morality" as a basis for a broader agenda on which to continue opposition to apartheid legislation and changed its name to the Black Sash.²² What the notion of "political morality" encompassed was debated, contested, and revised in the next four decades during which the Black Sash operated as a women's non-party political pressure group and members were confronted with the deprivations which apartheid imposed on the black South African population to perpetuate white supremacy.²³

This thesis focuses on the development and application of the notion of political morality by the Black Sash between 1955 and 1959. Nira Yuval-Davis has argued that the duties of a mother to instill moral values generationally within national collectives, is a common construction of the gender dimensions of nationalism.²⁴ While the Black Sash notion of political morality was grounded in the Cape Liberal tradition which focused on

²² During the League's protest over the Senate Act, members donned black sashes as a sign of mourning over the South African Constitution and they became popularly known in newspaper accounts as the Black Sash. Women's Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of National Conference, Bloemfontein (26-28 April 1956), 20, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

²³ In 1994 the members voted to turn over the day to day operations of the Black Sash to the Black Sash Trust and the Black Sash became an NGO dedicated to "making human rights real" for all members of South African society "...to enable all...with an emphasis on women and children...to recognize and exercise their human rights, particularly their social and economic rights. And to create a society that has effective laws and delivery systems, including comprehensive social protection for the most vulnerable." The Black Sash, http://www.blacksash.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1519&Itemid=212 (accessed 8 February, 2010).

²⁴ Nira Yuval-Davis, "Gender and Nation," in, *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: The Politics of Transition*, ed. Rick Wolford and Robert Miller (New York: Rutledge, 1998), 28.

individual rights and was situated in the diverse traditions of South African mission Christians, it was also a gendered liberal ideology because it was animated in part by motherisms. Motherhood was a crucial platform on which the League and the Black Sash based the legitimacy of their protest during these early years. The women who joined the League and who marched on 25 May, protested the Senate Act as mothers, "...the ones who have borne the children of today, who are the South Africans of tomorrow..."²⁵ They presented a message which resonated with the public because English, African and Afrikaner communities imbued motherhood with moral authority and conferred responsibility on mothers as the protectors of the health and morality of their children. Joan Wallach-Scott contends that as a result of "narratives that focus on women's experiences and analyze the way in which politics construct gender and gender constructs politics...history then becomes...the exposure of the often silent and hidden operations of gender that are nonetheless present and defining forces in the organization of most societies."²⁶ Motherism—political activity by women situated in their social identities as mothers—is one such operation of gender which defined opposition to apartheid by both African and white women activists during the 1950's. African women's militant opposition to pass laws during the 1950's was situated in the historical tradition of motherism which motivated African women's resistance to pass laws, residence permits and other legislation designed to conscript them into domestic service in white homes. The Black Sash also examined the effects of influx control and the deprivation of civil

²⁵ Hoernle, "An Appeal to the People of South Africa," Black Sash Society Papers.

²⁶ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 25.

liberties generally between 1956 and 1963 through the lens of motherhood. They viewed apartheid as destroying the ability of African women to protect their families as well as endangering the future of their own children. Their opposition to apartheid, grounded in liberal principles of individual rights was often expressed in terms of motherhood. Moreover, the practical resistance to apartheid in which the Black Sash engaged by operating advice offices and monitoring pass courts was initiated to help African women to remain with their children.

In South Africa, motherisms have a complex and contradictory history among African, English and Afrikaans-speaking communities. A number of historians writing in the 1980's and 1990's who highlighted complexities of women's experience in the pre-apartheid and early apartheid eras from a Marxist-feminist perspective held a dim view of motherisms.²⁷ Most of these examinations focused on black women's experience and some minimized the legitimacy of African women's social identities as mothers as a basis for activism because they assumed that actions which defended a woman's space and identity as a mother also negated her rights as a woman.²⁸ Cheryl Walker's seminal history, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, is one example of this perspective. Walker describes African women's resistance to passes in the late 1950's this way:

For the most part, opposition to passes was bound up with a conservative defense of traditional institutions—chieftainship, the patriarchal family, established sex roles. The women who defied the reference book units

²⁷ Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982), 264; Belinda Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 9, no. 2 (April 1983): 139-171; Julia C. Wells, *We Now Demand! The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993); Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams: Domestic Workers Under Apartheid* (London: The Women's Press, 1989).

²⁸ Cheryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 29; Belinda Bozzoli, "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies," 162; Wells, *We Now Demand!* 1.

were not demonstrating consciously for freedom or equality; one of the strongest reasons why women were opposed to passes was that they were seen as a direct threat to the family.²⁹

In the preface to the 2nd edition of *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, Walker admitted that her assumptions about motherisms were overly-broad, remarking, “Today, I would wish to look more carefully at the assumption that women’s defense of their maternal roles constituted a negation of their rights as women—that women’s rights somehow is at odds with the maternal role and that organization around the latter is evidence of an unproblematic conservatism and defense of patriarchy.”³⁰

Marxist-feminist perspectives of motherisms also imagined middle-class white women as defenders of an unproblematic and subordinated domesticity which collaborated in the capitalist exploitation of black workers.³¹ Belinda Bozzoli argued in “Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies” that middle-class and upper middle-

²⁹ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 207. Belinda Bozzoli, who viewed African women’s activism primarily as resistance to proletarianization, characterized black women’s resistance as “intensely conservative” because it sought to maintain and consolidate the family and their position within the family. African women’s resistance to the dissolution of traditional family structures was an attempt to preserve, Bozzoli argues, “the kind of family life [including] the kind of patriarchy, in which they had been raised.” Bozzoli, “Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies,” 169. Similarly Julia Wells considered motherism as imbued with a “powerful conservative element” which “reinforced traditional gender defined roles.” She argues that the women who participated in the anti-pass protests were attempting to reinforce an appropriate balance between their household responsibilities and earning money “...as black men defined their expectations of what their womenfolk could and could not achieve...” Wells, *We Now Demand!* 1-2. The women who led the Bloemfontein anti-pass campaign in 1913 were elite, educated women like Charlotte Maxeke, who had been educated in the United States at Wilberforce University in Ohio. But Wells assumed that they would not have designed and executed a passive resistance campaign unless they had been influenced by the discussion of passive resistance as they served the male delegates to the South African Natives National Conference held at the Waaihoek location in Bloemfontein in 1912. (39). Wells also dismissed evidence of a feminist consciousness by the women of Potchefstroom in 1930. Yet Josie Palmer was an educated activist and Communist who was the “key leader” of the campaign. (67) Finally, the language of the Women’s Charter of the Federation of South African Women demonstrates that the women who wrote and ratified it were not conservative defenders of women’s traditional gender-defined roles. Even Wells characterizes this document as “...a broad statement of equal rights for women regardless of race.” (106-107).

³⁰ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, xx.

³¹ Bozzoli, “Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies,” 161; Cock, *Maids and Madams*, 1; Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 21-22.

class women were liberated from domestic labour by the employment of black women as domestic workers, but they were excluded from professions and political pursuits by an “extraordinarily well-protected and long-established system of male privilege.”³² As a result, Bozzoli concluded, middle and upper middle-class white women never developed a feminist consciousness.³³ Walker adopted a similar perspective of white women as reflected by her characterization of the Black Sash. She opined:

Most members of the Black Sash looked askance at the Congress Alliance as a radical and potentially subversive organization...As originally conceived, the Black Sash was essentially a conservative organization...formed to protect the constitution, not to seek radical change... Over the years it shifted to a more genuinely liberal position; its preoccupation throughout the 1950's however, was with white politics—white public opinion, white political parties, and essentially, white solutions to the political conflict in South Africa...Although it became more amenable to the FSAW after 1956, it was still chary of too close an identification with the Congress Alliance.³⁴

Helen Scanlon's portrait of Eulalie Stott in *Representation and Reality: Portraits of Women's Lives in the Western Cape 1948-1976* identified subtle complexities of the Black Sash which had not had been previously considered.³⁵ However, Scanlon's portraits do not permit her to demonstrate the changing perspectives among the women of the Black Sash, examine the struggles of the Black Sash to resist patriarchy, or to define a

³² Bozzoli argued that middle-class white women had achieved a certain status as wives and mothers, and as managers of domestic labour, but they remained bounded in a “purdah-like” existence from which philanthropic activities were their main means of escape. Bozzoli, 161. See also Cock, *Maids and Madams*, 1.

³³ Bozzoli, “Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies,” 161. Her use of the description “purdah-like” implies both domestic and religious subordination of women in the home.

³⁴ Walker, 175. As we shall see in Chapter 5, the archival evidence establishes that the Black Sash was “chary” of too close association with the white women of the Congress of Democrats, not the Congress Alliance. By 1957 and 1958, the Black Sash leadership in the Western Cape and Johannesburg sought to establish closer relationships with African women in the ANC Women's League.

³⁵ Scanlon, *Representation and Reality: Portraits of Women's Lives in the Western Cape: 1948-1976* (Cape Town: HRSC Press, 2007).

gendered vision of liberalism through the notion of political morality. As a result, Scanlon's conclusions deviate very little from Walker's characterization of the Black Sash.³⁶

Nomboniso Gasa questions the ways Marxist and feminist scholars have evaluated and characterized African women's activism during the 1950's in her recent essay, "Feminisms, motherisms, patriarchies and women's voices in the 1950's."³⁷ Gasa suggests that analysis of black women's activism is often obscured by "interpretations imposed on history and its meanings by a feminist historiography that intends to confirm one school of thought or the other."³⁸ Emphasizing a crucial factor not adequately addressed by previous scholars Gasa notes, "African women were homeless by state design."³⁹ Women's resistance to passes which were "a tangible infringement of their rights," Gasa contends, "...was, in fact a struggle to be in the public domain at the same time that it was a struggle for free movement."⁴⁰ She also takes issue with debates over whether the discourse of motherism used so effectively by the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) is one which confirms women's subordination under patriarchy

³⁶ Scanlon profiled Eulalie Stott, who was part of the core of liberal leaders of the Black Sash during its early years, as a conservative foil to her portrait of Ray Alexander, a committed Communist and trade unionist who was a founder of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) during the 1950's. As compared with Ray Alexander, Eulalie Stott appears very conservative. As compared with the FSAW, a multi-racial alliance of women's organizations committed to a universal democratic franchise, the Black Sash appears to be a stodgy organization of privileged middle class white women. Yet, the Black Sash was considerably more liberal than the vast majority of white women in the Western Cape. After the FSAW became inactive because many of its leaders had been arrested or banned by 1960, the Black Sash represented the face of public opposition to apartheid by white women.

³⁷ Nomboniso Gasa, "Feminisms, motherisms, patriarchies and women's voices in the 1950's," in *Basus'iimbokodo, bawel'imilambo/They remove boulders and cross rivers: Women in South African History*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press. 2007).

³⁸ Gasa, "Feminisms, motherisms, patriarchies and women's voices in the 1950's," 215.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Gasa, 214. Similarly, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, the Black Sash movement was also a struggle for a voice by white women in the public political arena.

or whether motherism is a moral call to action centered on women's roles as mothers and defenders of their children when men are unable or unwilling to act.⁴¹ Gasa asks, "How does feminism clash with the protection of one's children? Why does it have to?"⁴² Referring to African women's anti-pass campaigns, Gasa observes, "This period...has not been studied on its own terms and for its own significance."⁴³ She contends persuasively that there is a need for a "non-linear, nuanced approach [to women's history] that is informed by the understanding that women straddle many positions...motherist movements...which are often women and mother-centered in their political approach, have played important roles in specific contexts...in some cases they are powerful in themselves."⁴⁴

Gasa's observations regarding the FSAW are also applicable to the Black Sash. Although the Black Sash have been depicted as a homogenous group of middle-class white women whose perspectives were situated in white privilege, their agenda to promote political morality included multiple strategies of resistance to the racialized patriarchy of the white state. They maintained a national organization by mediating regional and ideological differences among their members and promoted a women's moral voice in the public political discourse of the nation. Their opposition to the injustices of apartheid included education, propaganda, demonstrations, inter-racial alliances and practical resistance through the Bail Fund and Advice Offices. Motherism and Christianity provided moral legitimacy to the Black Sash and fostered alliances with

⁴¹ Gasa, 214.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Gasa, 215.

⁴⁴ Gasa, 226.

black women across divides of race and class to support a mother's right to protect and care for her children.

Between 1955 and 1963, the membership of Black Sash was limited to women voters.⁴⁵ Since only white women could vote, only white women could be members of the Black Sash. The perspectives of the middle-class white women who joined the Black Sash were limited by structural, social and political privilege and members held complex and diverse attitudes about political rights for black South Africans. However, as they engaged in advice office activities and pass court monitoring, they saw the effects of pass laws, job reservation, and forced removals on black families. Members were confronted with the fact that their own privileges as white mothers to protect and care for their children depended on a system which denied those rights to African mothers. Jenny de Tolley, President of the Black Sash in the early 1990's described the confrontation between members' privilege and their activities in the Black Sash this way:

In the Black Sash, you were part of two societies. The Black Sash exposed people to what was really going on in South Africa and then you lived in white society. The Black Sash put faces to the system that supported white people's privilege. When I joined the Black Sash I went to the Langa Pass Court as a monitor. I sat there for four weeks and saw women with babies on their backs, holding the hand of a small child. They were there looking for their husbands or they were sick. On the fifth week I wept and wept because the reality of it finally became real to me on a personal level. There were astonishing experiences that were happening to people beyond the white suburbs and I couldn't go back to the way I was before. Apartheid was so successful in keeping people apart physically and emotionally. I felt like I lived in a different world from my family.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Women's Defense of the Constitution League, Constitution, Article 2 (April 1956). Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁴⁶ Jenny de Tolly, in personal conversation with the author, 29 Jul 2009, Rondebosch, Cape Town.

Motherisms provided a crucial platform on which members of the Black Sash formed alliances with African women. The first multi-racial campaign against apartheid in which the Black Sash participated was the Cape Association for the Abolition of Passes to African Women (C.A.T.A.P.A.W.). They joined this coalition because they were convinced by African women that passes interfered with their ability to protect and provide for their children. Articles and commentary in *The Black Sash*, directed at “educating” white women, often invoked motherhood to critique apartheid policies because they were destroying African families.⁴⁷ When the Cape Western Region set up the first bail fund in 1958, the loans to fund bail were designated for women arrested for pass law violations.⁴⁸ Opposition to apartheid by the Black Sash was explicitly gendered and represented resistance to racialized patriarchal relations of power which viewed white women as having no role in the public political arena and black women as the “superfluous appendages” of black men.⁴⁹

Christianity also influenced the development of the notion of political morality during the early years of the Black Sash. In his essay, “Mission Christianity and Interwar Liberalism,” Richard Elphick contends that “Christian links to liberalism [are] central to

⁴⁷ See for example, *Black Sash* III, no. 19 (June/July 1959). This issue was entirely devoted to the effect of pass laws on Africans and specifically highlighted the destruction of African families. “Why We Don’t Want Passes,” by Bertha Thage of the ANCWL, articulated African women’s objections to passes. *Black Sash*, 20-21.

⁴⁸ Eulalie Stott to Mrs. Michaelis, 13 September, 1961, Black Sash Cape Western Region Papers: BC 668.E.10, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department. Mrs. Stott’s letter was sent to previous donors to the bail fund for women and requested that they permit the Black Sash to use these donations for men.

⁴⁹ The characterization of African women as “superfluous appendages” of African men is attributed to George F. van L. Froneman, National Party M.P. who became Deputy Minister of Justice, Mines and Planning. Froneman made this statement in support of tighter influx control policies to control migratory labour. Hilda Bernstein, *For Their Triumphs and For Their Tears: Women in Apartheid South Africa*. (London: International Defense and Aid Fund, 1978), also available online at <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=/books/triumphs.html> (accessed 25 April 2010).

understanding the liberal tradition in South Africa.”⁵⁰ Elphick notes that during the early twentieth century, white liberal-minded mission Christian administrators became increasingly dependent on black clergy and lay leaders for influence, but failed to mount “a sustained critique of the South African political order...”⁵¹ Secular dimensions of liberalism focused on anthropological, cultural, political and economic approaches to understanding the “native problem,” gained ascendancy over the idea that individual morality was the standard by which South Africans must be judged. The Christian focus on the value of the individual, according to Elphick, failed to appeal to white South Africans “...who were steadily developing segregationist policies which made groups, not individuals, the bedrock of social analysis.”⁵² However, as Deborah Gaitskell notes, Christian women’s groups in Anglican and Methodist churches primarily focused on fostering Christian motherhood “provided the only opportunity for English-speaking white women to relate to black women outside the employer-employee relationship of domestic service.”⁵³ Inter-racial Christian women’s groups were maintained through individual contacts in which women came together as Christian mothers and took up campaigns on social issues which impinged on women’s lives.⁵⁴ The focus on political morality by the Black Sash was situated in the traditions of Christian women’s groups

⁵⁰ Richard Elphick, “Mission Christianity and Interwar Liberalism,” in *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect* ed. Jeffrey Butler, Richard Elphick and David Welsh (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987), 65.

⁵¹ Elphick, “Mission Christianity and Interwar Liberalism,” 73.

⁵² Elphick, 78

⁵³ Deborah Gaitskell, “Whose Heartland and Which Periphery? Christian Women Crossing South Africa’s Racial Divide in the Twentieth Century,” *Women’s History Review* 11, no.3 (2002): 377.

⁵⁴ Gaitskell, 380.

and Christianity gave motherism a moral certainty that liberalism alone could not provide.⁵⁵

The language of Christianity was also a means by which the Black Sash sought to persuade white South Africans of the value of the individual and the immorality of apartheid which negated individual liberty and undermined a mother's ability to provide for her children. *The Black Sash* critiqued apartheid using the language of Christianity as early as July, 1956 and continued to do so for many years.⁵⁶ Liberal, Christian inter-racial alliances in groups such as C.A.T.A.P.A.W. formed in 1957, the Bishop's Committee formed in 1958, the Defense and Aid Committee, formed in 1960 and Dependent's Conference, formed in 1963, were in the tradition of inter-racial consultations of earlier generations of liberals and mission Christians. However, Black Sash participation in these alliances departed from previous liberal traditions in significant ways. Formed under the umbrella of a shared faith and influenced by motherisms, these alliances challenged rather than reinforced privileged perspectives and became a site for internal conflict within the Black Sash. Through their participation in these alliances, women of

⁵⁵ On 10 April, 1956, the Black Sash issued a press release indentifying five principles concerning political morality in "Public Matters" and five principles of political morality applied to "Individual Rights." The principles included "building up of democracy with a balance between the legislative, executive and judiciary," as "Public Matters." Principles which guided "individual Rights," included "the right to take part in political activity." According to the Black Sash, these rights should not be limited on the basis of race. The Black Sash, "Principles," (10 April, 1956), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁵⁶ In July, 1956 *The Black Sash* began the first of a series of articles entitled, "The Voice of the Church" in which church leaders were invited to "declare their church's attitude to the problems of race and colour which beset our society." *The Black Sash* 1 no. 4 (July 1956). The first article was written by Rev. Dr. J.B. Webb, of the Methodist Church. According to Dr. Webb, "...the Methodist Church believes in the doctrine that all men are equal in the sight of God. It is strongly opposed to any kind of discrimination on the grounds of colour, whether that discrimination has to do with legal, administrative or any other kind of process. It is firmly convinced that the day must come when all sections of the community will have a direct voice in the government of the country." (9).

the Black Sash developed a deeper understanding of the impact of apartheid policies on black women. Crucially, the Black Sash began to see themselves as partners in these alliances rather than as leaders or supervisors.

Black Sash Activism and Liberal Historiography

Existing scholarship does not expose these dimensions of Black Sash activism. Scholarly examinations of liberal opposition to apartheid either fail to mention the Black Sash altogether or mention the organization only in passing, grouping them with other liberal organizations without discussing the specifics of their involvement in particular events. For example, Paul Rich published two books on liberalism during the apartheid era, neither of which mentions the Black Sash.⁵⁷ Douglas Irvine examined the extra-parliamentary activities and associations of the Liberal Party without once mentioning the Black Sash even though prominent liberal women like Eulalie Stott and Margaret Ballinger were members.⁵⁸ Tom Lodge and Randolph Vigne mention the Black Sash as one of the liberal groups which opposed apartheid but pay little attention to the roles they played in campaigns in which white liberals collaborated with the ANC or the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC).⁵⁹

The three published histories of the Black Sash also tend to reify the organization as a homogenous group of well-intentioned, liberal, white middle-class women without

⁵⁷ See Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism, 1921-60; Hope and Despair: English-Speaking Intellectuals and South African Politics, 1896-1976* (London: British Academic Press, 1993).

⁵⁸ See Douglas Irvine, "The Liberal Party, 1953-1968" in Butler, Elphick and, Welsh *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect*, 116-133.

⁵⁹ See Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (London: Longman Group, 1983); Randolph Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-68* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

considering whether their opposition to apartheid was also a resistance to racialized patriarchal relations of power. These works do not examine the gendered nature of the notion of political morality or the influence of motherisms and Christianity on Black Sash activism which led white women to cross the racial divide to support universal rights of liberty and equality before the law. They also imply that membership losses after 1956 and repeated election victories by the NP over the next four decades indicate that the Black Sash was ineffective. None of these works discuss the ways that Black Sash activism challenged long-standing white patriarchal attitudes about the role of women in public political discourse by raising an intentionally gendered moral voice of opposition to apartheid and withstanding repeated attempts by the NP and the UP to silence it.

The Black Sash: The Story of the Women's Defense of the Constitution League published in 1956 by Mirabel Rogers a member of the Black Sash, is essentially a hagiography of the first year of the organization told from the perspective of Ruth Foley, one of the founders and the President of the League.⁶⁰ Mrs. Rogers portrays the leaders of Black Sash as having agency in their own right, provides background information and quotes extensively from newspaper accounts of the protest against the Senate Act. However, Rogers provides no critical analysis of the competing interests and perspectives among Black Sash members and glosses over widening disagreements over goals and strategies which were evident as early as 1956. Rogers's account of the Black Sash during its first year promotes a view of the Black Sash as a homogenous group of

⁶⁰ Mirabel Rogers, *The Black Sash*. Profits from the book were contributed to the Black Sash to fund its continued activities. Cape Western Black Sash News Sheet No. 2 (November 1956), Black Sash Archival Collection, Cape Western Region Papers: BC 668.D.2, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts & Archives Department.

relatively conservative women who focused primarily on white parliamentary democracy and unity between English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. Minutes of the Bloemfontein National Conference of the League in 1956 however, reflect a diversity of perspective and opinion both among the leaders and in branches about the purpose of the League and the meaning of political morality.⁶¹ While unity between English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans was one focus of the League, archival documents demonstrate that relationships between English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans were only one part of an overall strategy to promote political morality, justice and democracy for all segments of the population.⁶²

The Black Sash of South Africa: A Case Study in Liberalism by Cherry Michelman presents liberalism in South Africa as a unitary political orthodoxy primarily driven by secular English-speaking South Africans. Michelman did not examine the ways that gender influenced women's perspectives of liberalism. She characterizes the Black Sash as "existing within [the] web of liberal organizations," without whose support the Black Sash, "... could not function and possibly could not even survive."⁶³ According to Michelman, "The unanimity" of the liberal voices indicates "...how little they could afford... the luxury of disagreement among themselves."⁶⁴ As a result, Michelman's account of the Black Sash portrays them as little more than a women's auxiliary of the Liberal Party. Michelman also concludes that the decline in membership and the schisms

⁶¹ Women's Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of the National Conference at Bloemfontein, (26-28 April 1956), Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶² See, The Black Sash, National Conference at Pietermaritzburg (22-24 May 1957), Secretary's Notes, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3.

⁶³ Cherry Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 10.

⁶⁴ Michelman, 10.

which rocked the Black Sash between 1956 and 1958 are examples of overreaching by the organization.⁶⁵ She characterizes the leaders of the Black Sash as having to abandon “the illusion...that women *qua* women had mystical powers, virtues, and irresistible strengths.”⁶⁶ This patronizing characterization ignores the ideological basis of the controversies and the gendered dimensions of the conflict between the Black Sash and the UP. On this point, she failed to recognize the struggle of the Black Sash to remain independent of male dominated political parties and to frame its own vision of liberalism.⁶⁷ The archival evidence reveals that the leaders of the Black Sash were realists who were under few illusions about the difficult struggle they faced. During a debate at the national conference in Bloemfontein in April 1956 over the implications of broadening the focus of the Black Sash based on “political morality,” Mrs. Davidoff of Johannesburg told the other delegates she hoped that “each delegate realized the importance of the policy and knew what they were doing.”⁶⁸ She said, “The Black Sash has started down a difficult and long road. We will be asked our opinions on many problems, on every facet of this complex, multi-racial society. Were we satisfied? Had every region analyzed...and made sure we are 100% behind [the new policy]?”⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Michelman, 76.

⁶⁶ Michelman, 39.

⁶⁷ Insistence on independence from political parties and other pressure groups became a hallmark of the Black Sash. It was enshrined in its constitution and repeatedly invoked. In August, 1955, the leaders of the League rebuffed the first attempt to submerge the organization with another group in which men were the leaders. The Black Sash, Constitution, Article 2 (1956); Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of Johannesburg Committee, 23 August, 1955. Black Sash Society Papers CAMP Collection, MF 2552 reel 1.

⁶⁸ Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of the National Conference at Bloemfontein, 15, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Michelman asserts that before 1959, the leadership “declined to participate in multiracial activities, even refusing to permit non-white speakers to address Black Sash meetings.”⁷⁰ Yet the archival evidence shows that the Cape Western Region held multi-racial public meetings as early as 1956 and opposed the “Church Clause” of the Native Laws Amendment Act (NLAA) because it interfered with inter-racial meetings. The National Conference gave approval for the Cape Western Region to participate in C.A.T.A.P.A.W. in 1957 and agreed in principle that the region might commit acts of civil disobedience to protest the ban on meetings of more than ten Africans under the NLAA.⁷¹ In June, 1957 the Johannesburg Branch sent three observers to the FSAW National Conference.⁷² In 1958 and thereafter the Black Sash organized a series of multi-racial “Brains Trusts” providing a public forum for inter-racial discussion of political issues.⁷³ In 1959, even though it occasioned Ruth Foley’s resignation, the National Council approved the official representation of the Black Sash on the multi-racial

⁷⁰ Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 41. The minutes of a meeting of the Bryanston Branch in May 1956 are the basis for this assertion. The Bryanston Branch resolution occasioned an immediate visit from the chairman of the Transvaal Region who ascertained that the concern of the branch was that they were moving too far from the League’s original focus on constitutionalism. The resolution was withdrawn before the next Regional Conference of the Southern Transvaal Region. The Black Sash, Minutes of Committee Meeting of the Black Sash Bryanston Branch, 8 May 1956, 1-2; Dora Hill to Branch Chairs of Southern Transvaal Region, 15 October, 1956; Minutes of Regional Committee Meeting, 7 November 1956, 2, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

⁷¹ The Black Sash, Secretary’s Notes of National Conference at Pietermaritzburg (22-24 May, 1957), Resolution 8B, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3; The Black Sash, “Report on National Council Meeting Given by Mrs. Hill at the Committee Meeting on 26 Sept. 1957,” Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

⁷² The Black Sash, Minutes of Committee Meeting, 19 June, 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

⁷³ See, *The Black Sash* III, no. 17 (April 1959).

Bishop's Committee.⁷⁴ By 1960, a persistent group of members sought to open membership to all women regardless of race.⁷⁵

Kathryn Spink's work, *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa* is a popular history of the Black Sash from 1956 – 1990.⁷⁶ Spink portrays the Black Sash as a courageous and well-intentioned group of middle-class white women who confronted the inequities of South African society under apartheid but sometimes failed to comprehend the complexities which confronted the Nationalist government.⁷⁷ Like Michelman, Spink maintains a static perspective of liberalism in South Africa and she does not consider ways that gender influenced the liberal vision of the Black Sash. Instead, Spink focuses on ways the Black Sash acted as an intermediary between whites and blacks through advice offices, pass-court monitoring and the work of Molly Blackburn and Di Bishop in the Eastern Cape. Although Spink notes that early statements by the Black Sash were couched in terms of Christianity, she discounts the Christian perspectives of early members stating, "Appeals to the nation were rich in Biblical quotations and calls to prayer, to a point where the confrontation between good and evil...took the form of a kind of pious one-upmanship."⁷⁸ Like Rogers, Spink glosses over the early disagreements in the Black Sash leadership over whether to focus on educating white voters or on

⁷⁴ The Black Sash, Minutes of National Council Meeting (9-12 June 1959), 17-24, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

⁷⁵ The Black Sash, "Open Ranks?" Border Region Resolution for 1963 National Conference, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection reel 4.

⁷⁶ Kathryn Spink, *Black Sash: The Beginning of a Bridge in South Africa*. (London: Methuen, 1991).

⁷⁷ Spink, 19-20.

⁷⁸ Spink, 42.

promoting individual rights for all peoples in South Africa.⁷⁹ Both Spink and Michelman question the effectiveness of the Black Sash based on its dwindling membership after 1956 and on the National Party's continued electoral victories throughout the apartheid era.

This thesis argues that the notion of political morality as a gendered adaptation of liberalism which drew ideas from motherism and Christianity, deeply informed the anti-apartheid resistance strategies of the Black Sash. The Black Sash scrutinized the social and political structures of apartheid through the lens of political morality and insisted on maintaining an independent women-focused moral voice of opposition to the injustices of apartheid. Black Sash activism, based as it was on the notion of political morality and informed by motherisms, resisted the racialized patriarchy of the apartheid state and the subordination of women in South Africa during the second half of the twentieth century.⁸⁰ Despite its small size, the Black Sash was perhaps the most visible public face of white liberal opposition to apartheid. The leaders of the Black Sash in the early years succeeded in maintaining the organization as a national women's organization despite diverse perspectives and regional interests among branches and concerted attempts by the United Party and the National Party to assimilate, marginalize or destroy the organization. Participation in the activities of the Black Sash enabled some white women to shed privileged perspectives and confront the contradictions between their vision of political morality and white supremacy to form alliances with African women.

⁷⁹ Spink, 73.

⁸⁰ See, The Black Sash, Newsletter Report for Period November 1955 to 26 April 1956 in Minutes of National Conference of the Women's Defense of the Constitution League at Bloemfontein (26-28 April 1956), Black Sash Society Papers.

Chapter Two investigates the historical precedents for the notion of political morality and contextualizes Black Sash activism between 1955 and 1959 within political and social developments of the first half of the twentieth century. Political activity by the Black Sash had historical precedents among English and Afrikaans-speaking women in the women's suffrage movement. But Black Sash activism differed from earlier precedents because they refused to subordinate their moral voice in the public political debate to collaborate with the racialized patriarchy of the white state. The Black Sash notion of political morality was partly situated in the traditions of mission Christians who sought to bridge racial divides through inter-racial consultation. However the Black Sash departed from earlier traditions of mission Christians which failed to mount a sustained critique of white supremacy. Motherisms propelled them to collaborate with African women to oppose oppressive influx control legislation which threatened to destroy African women's ability to care for and protect their children. Chapter Three examines the League's opposition to the Senate Act and illustrates ways that their opposition to the Senate Act also constituted resistance to white patriarchy which imagined a subordinate space for white women's voices in public political debates and African women as the superfluous appendages of black men. Chapter Four examines the complex perspectives among the various branches and regions of the Black Sash which led to the internal ideological controversies over the application of political morality between 1956 and 1958. These conflicts resulted in a mass efflux of members but paved the way for the Sash to engage in more concrete and sustained collaboration with Africans to oppose apartheid after 1958. Chapter Five examines the first, hesitant steps toward inter-racial

collaboration by the Black Sash in C.A.T.P.A.W., the Cape Western Bail Fund Office, and the Bishop's Committee in Johannesburg.

2. “Loyal Women Citizens of the Union of South Africa”: White Women in a White State, 1910-1955

On 27 May 1955, two days after the League marched in Johannesburg, the South African Parliament debated the Senate Act. The debate lasted for more than thirty hours. Eric Louw, National Party Minister of Finance and External Affairs, used the debate as an opportunity to ridicule the women’s march and undermine their moral authority by describing the women of the League as hysterical, easily led, and objects of sexual imagination. He called the march a display of hysteria, “...like that of their daughters who got worked up when some well-known movie actor or crooner [arrives] in South Africa.” He blamed the hysteria on the press “...who had been trying to create fear during the past week or more.” Finally he crudely commented on the women’s anatomy jeering, “They say they marched six abreast. Well I don’t know about their hip measurements but...”⁸¹ As expected, Parliament passed the Senate Act.

The leaders of the League were not deterred by Mr. Louw’s ridicule. Following the Johannesburg march, they used a phone tree system to create local branches across South Africa. They also had Mrs. Hoernle’s speech reprinted in pamphlet form and it was distributed widely along with their manifesto. On 30 May the League initiated a petition drive and recruited women to sign a petition to the Governor-General, Dr Jansen, an appointee of the National Party, urging him to use his power of veto over the Senate

⁸¹ Quoted in Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 23.

Act.⁸² The Petition, presented by “loyal women citizens of the Union of South Africa” complained of the Senate Bill as “an abuse of powers” creating an “...artificial two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament in order to circumvent one of the two entrenched Clauses of the Constitution, (Clause 35)...”⁸³ The Petition connected the League’s opposition to the Senate Act with their “special responsibility” as women who “...received our votes within the constitutional framework of the parliamentary system designed by the Act...”⁸⁴ By 10 June over one-hundred-thousand women had signed.⁸⁵

⁸² Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, Petition Form 1, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1. Although the Governor-General represented the British Crown, the South African Parliament appointed the Governor-General. In 1955, the Governor-General was the Hon. Ernest George Jansen, a retired National Party MP, appointed to the post in 1951. Dr. Jansen had been the Speaker of the House of Assembly between 1934 and 1936. Despite pressure from the Nationalist Party and General Hertzog in 1934, Dr. Jansen ruled that the South African Constitution required Parliament to pass the Separate Representation of Natives Act which disenfranchised African men in the Cape, by a two-thirds majority of votes. Ellison Kahn “Notes on South African Constitutional Law,” *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 33, no. 3 (1951): 89. In 1952 when the Appellate Division struck down the Separate Representation of Voters Act as unconstitutional, the court relied on Dr. Jansen’s ruling in 1934 requiring strict adherence to the requirement of a two-thirds majority vote to overturn an entrenched clause of the South African Constitution. Colin Rhys Lovell, “Afrikaner Nationalism and Apartheid,” *The American Historical Review* 61, no.2 (January 1956): 328.

⁸³ Petition, Black Sash Society Papers. Clause 35 entrenched the qualified non-racial franchise in the Cape Province. By 1955, Clause 35 protected the qualified franchise for classified Coloured men only.

⁸⁴ Petition, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁸⁵ Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 24-30. Dr. Sheila van Der Horst, a Senior Lecturer in Economics at the University of Cape Town, and Chairman of the Cape Western Regional Committee of the South African Institute of Race Relations called on the women of the Cape to sign the petition to the Governor General, “...for the sake of their children to show their disapproval of this measure which undermines the contract of Union and threatens the security of all South Africans.” (27).

Form No. 1.	Form nr. 1
PETITION	PETISIE
To His Excellency the Hon. Ernest George Jansen, Doctor of Laws, Governor-General of the Union of South Africa:	Aan Sy Eksellensie, Sy Hoogedelike Ernest George Jansen, Doktor in die Regte, Goewerneur-Generaal van die Unie van Suid-Afrika.
Petition for the exercise by His Excellency of his powers and discretions in terms of the Status of Union Act (Act No. 69 of 1934).	Petisie vir die uitoefening deur Sy Eksellensie van sy magte en diskresies ooreenkomstig die Wet op die Status van die Unie (Wet nr. 69 van 1934).
The Petition of the undersigned Petitioners humbly sheweth that:—	Die Petisie van die ondergetekende Petisionarisse, diu eerbiediglik aan dat:—
1. Your Petitioners are the signatories of this Petition, all of whom are loyal women citizens of the Union of South Africa.	1. U Petisionarisse is die ondertekenaars van hierdie Petisie en is getroue vroulike burgers van die Unie van Suid-Afrika.
2. A Bill known as the Senate Bill will in due course, it is feared, be passed by both Houses of Parliament and presented to your Excellency for signature (Act No. 69 of 1934).	2. Dit word gevrees dat die wetsontwerp, wat bekend staan as die Senaatwetsontwerp, mettertyd deur albei Huisse van die Volksraad aangenom en aan u Eksellensie voorgelê sal word vir u handtekening ooreenkomstig Wet nr. 69 van 1934.
Your Petitioners respectfully request your Excellency to withhold your assent to the said Senate Bill and to deal therewith in terms of the powers and discretions vested in your Excellency in terms of Section 8 of the Status of Union Act (Act No. 69 of 1934).	U Petisionarisse versoek u Eksellensie met eerbied om u toestemming van die genoemde Senaatwetsontwerp te onthou en daarmee te handel ooreenkomstig die magte en diskresies aan u Eksellensie verleen kragtens die bepalinge van Artikel 8 van die genoemde Unie-Statuswet.
3. Your Petitioners humbly request your Excellency to consider these our submissions:	3. U Petisionarisse versoek u Eksellensie met eerbied om gehoor te gee aan ons ondervermelde vertoe.
That the intention of the Senate Bill, on the admission of your Excellency's Ministers of State, is to create an artificial two-thirds majority of both Houses in order to circumvent one of the Entrenched Clauses of the Act of Union (Section 35 read with Section 152). We consider that this is an abuse of powers in that it is a violation of parliamentary principle and of the spirit and intention of the Act of Union.	Dat die bedoeling met die Senaatwetsontwerp, voos erken deur u Eksellensie se Staatsministers, is om 'n kunsmatige tweederde meerderheid van albei Huisse te bewerkstellig ten einde een van die verregaande klousules van die Suid-Afrika Wet (naamlik Artikel 35 gelees met Artikel 152) te omseil. Ons beskou hierdie optrede as 'n misbruik van mag deurdat dit indruis teen parlementêre beginsel en die geest en bedoeling van die Suid-Afrika Wet.
We feel that as women we have a special responsibility in drawing your attention to this Bill. Women were not enfranchised at the time of the South Africa Act. We received our votes within the constitutional framework of the parliamentary system as defined in that Act. We owe a great loyalty both to the principles of the South Africa Act and to the traditions of parliamentary government. As women and as South African citizens we see the implications of the Senate Bill as so profound and so gravely damaging to tranquil and harmonious relations that we make this special appeal to your Excellency to exercise your discretionary powers and to veto this Bill.	Ons as vroue voel dat daar 'n besondere verantwoordelikheid op ons rus om u aandag op hierdie Wetsontwerp te vestig. Toe toe van die Suid-Afrika Wet het vroue nog nie die stemreg gehad nie. Ons het dit wel gekry binne die konstitusionele raamwerk van die parlementêre stelsel soos omskryf in daardie Wet. Ons voel ons geroepe om getrou te wees aan die beginsels van die Suid-Afrika Wet asook aan die tradisie van parlementêre regering. Ons as vroue en as burgers van Suid-Afrika doen hierdie besondere beroep op u Eksellensie om u diskresionêre magte uit te oefen om die veto uit te spreek oor die Senaatwetsontwerp daar ons bevrees is dat die gevolge van die natsontwerp van verreikende aard is en sodanig skade aan vreedsame verhoudinge sal aandoen.
Your Petitioners further humbly request that your Excellency give audience to them through their representatives to present verbal argument in support of this Petition.	U Petisionarisse smook verder eerbiediglik dat dit u Eksellensie sal behaag om aan hulle deur middel van verteenwoordigers audiensie te verleen ten einde mondelinge vertoe ter staving van hierdie petisie aan te bied.
And your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.	En u Petisionarisse, soot ons verplig is, smook.
NAME/NAAM:	ADDRESS/ADRES:

Figure 1. Petition from Women's Defense of the Constitution League to Governor-General. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

In a disappointing but not unexpected move, Governor-General Jansen announced on 21 June that he refused to veto the Senate Act.⁸⁶ Ruth Foley, speaking for the League, responded in a statement to the press, "We had hoped that our great effort would have had some effect. Our only consolation is that we did our duty to our consciences in

⁸⁶ The petition by the League to Dr. Jansen was likely intended to appeal to his philosophy of strict interpretation of the South African Constitution. No doubt the League hoped that he would veto the Senate Act because it enabled the National Party to achieve a two-thirds majority in the Senate through government appointment rather than election by the voters. The League's petition failed to move Dr. Jansen in 1955 and he refused to veto the Senate Act paving the way for the Separate Representation of Voters Act to pass in 1956.

expressing our dismay at this destructive piece of legislature...But we will not give up the fight...signatures for the Petition calling on Mr. Strijdom to resign will be collected.” Demonstrating her recognition of political reality and the determination of the women of the League to demonstrate their disapproval, Mrs. Foley concluded, “We know that Mr. Strijdom will not resign, but let him at least be aware of how great is our horror at what he has done.”⁸⁷ Although many of the English language papers wrote approvingly of the women’s protest and most of the Afrikaans press initially ignored it, commentary in the African press was more critical. “No Return to 1908” an article in *Fighting Talk*, the journal of the ANC and COD, argued “It is not a return to the spirit of 1908 that South Africans need for survival, but a break with that spirit...The old brings only a constant variation of a dying theme.”⁸⁸

In order to understand why certain white women joined the League in 1955 and remained in the Black Sash after the Senate Act and its progeny, the Separate Representation of Voters Act, became law in 1956, we need to understand the historical context of their action. The currents buffeting the women of the Black Sash emanated from social and political developments in the early twentieth century. The Act of Union in 1910 created a white state in which the rights of citizenship rested exclusively in the hands of men. During the early twentieth century both white women and African women

⁸⁷ Quoted in Rogers, 32.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Rogers, 84. The reference to a “dying theme” referred to the “conscious creation of a sense of white South Africanism” by the Milner “Kindergarten” following the South African war. See, Saul Dubow, “Colonial Nationalism, the Milner Kindergarten and the Rise of ‘South Africanism’, 1902-1910” *History Workshop Journal*, 43 (Spring 1997): 67. Even while commending the women’s courage, a commentary by Can Themba in the *Golden City Post*, noted the irony of white women’s “horror” over the Senate Act when they expressed no such horror at the disenfranchisement of qualified Africans in 1936. Themba observed, “It is an ironic situation, people who ought to be, want to be friends, cannot get at each other. One wants to offer the hand of friendship but one knows it will not be accepted. Can Themba, “US,” *Golden City Post* 25 November, 1956, quoted in its entirety in Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 130-131.

challenged patriarchy using their identities as mothers to legitimize political activity. However, African women were targeted by state policy which sought to impose and maintain white supremacy through controlling their movement, employment, and social independence. Motherism among African women was primarily driven by their urgent need to resist state attempts to interfere with their ability to provide for their children. After 1910, political activity among white women who were the beneficiaries of white privilege was directed at obtaining suffrage. While the women's suffrage movement challenged white patriarchy, it did not mount an intentional and sustained challenge to the racialized patriarchy of the system of white supremacy. White women ultimately obtained franchise rights because their votes increased the power of the white electorate, minimized the electoral impact of qualified Coloured men and enabled the government to disenfranchise qualified African men in the Cape.

This chapter examines historical threads of political activism among both white and black women between 1910 and 1955 and the traditions of liberal mission Christians which emphasized inter-racial consultation and the value of the individual. During the early 1950's as the National Party began to implement the legislative foundations of apartheid through strict influx control mechanisms which included extending passes to African women, black South Africans turned to coordinated strategies of civil disobedience as part of a programme of action to resist oppressive apartheid legislation. The constitutional chicanery by which the National Party government ensured the disenfranchisement of qualified, classified Coloured men in 1955 awakened some white women to public political activism on a scale that surpassed the women's suffrage

movement. Firm in their belief that a women's moral voice was necessary to counter the increasingly oppressive racialized patriarchy of the state, the leaders of the Women's Defense of the Constitution League broadened the League's focus to opposing unjust laws generally. Individual contacts between African women and white women fostered by associations in Christian women's organizations and the liberal and mission Christian tradition of inter-racial consultation set the stage for cautious cooperation between white women and African women and led to Black Sash involvement with African women's resistance to pass laws.

Gendered Dimensions of Segregation and Conflicting Visions of the White State, 1910-1920

It is crucial to note that by 1910 when the Union of South Africa was formed; just over twenty percent of the population was classified as white. As William Beinart and Saul Dubow observe, segregation and apartheid developed in a context in which "Europeans had conquered the indigenous population but could only partially displace it."⁸⁹ The Act of Union in 1910 consolidated political power in the hands of the white-minority population by limiting the franchise to white men, except in the Cape Province and Natal where a qualified non-racial franchise was retained for black men.⁹⁰ Clause 35 of the Constitution which retained the qualified non-racial franchise in the Cape and

⁸⁹ William Beinart and Saul Dubow, "The Historiography of Segregation and Apartheid," in *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa* ed. William Beinart and Saul Dubow (New York: Routledge, 1995), 2.

⁹⁰Robert Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 88-89. African and classified Coloured men who met certain statutory property and educational qualifications had been enfranchised in the Cape Province since 1853. Stanley Trapido, "The Origins of the Cape Franchise Qualifications of 1853" *Journal of African History* 5, no. 1 (1964): 37-54; Timothy Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*, 244-245.

Natal and Clause 137 granting equal status to English and Afrikaans as the official languages of South Africa were entrenched clauses which required a two-thirds majority vote in Parliament to eliminate.⁹¹ Since the Act of Union prohibited any black person from serving as a member of parliament, qualified Coloured and African men in the Cape could only vote for white candidates to represent them.⁹² Women could not vote in 1910. As Walker observes, “Women’s domestic and subordinate status was perpetuated by both the legal and educational systems.”⁹³ Married white women were deemed legal minors under a system of Roman-Dutch law and African women were deemed perpetual minors regardless of their marital status under customary law.⁹⁴ Parliament did not give serious consideration to women’s enfranchisement in South Africa until after WWI although the issue of women’s suffrage was first raised by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1895.⁹⁵ The members of the WCTU were white, middle-class, predominately

⁹¹ Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 24-25. The Senate Act aroused the unprecedented protests from the League in 1955 because the Senate Act was designed to enable the government to eliminate the qualified franchise for classified Coloured voters by creating a two-thirds National Party majority in Parliament through government appointment rather than election by the voters. Qualified African voters in the Cape and Natal had already been disenfranchised in 1936 by the Representation of Natives Act. Cheryl Walker, “The Women’s Suffrage Movement,” in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1948* ed. Cheryl Walker (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990), 314.

⁹² The franchise existed on paper only in Natal and the total number of qualified African and Coloured men who were able to vote in the Cape amounted to less than ten percent of all voters. Prior to the Act of Union in 1910 qualified black South Africans voted for white representatives as a matter of tradition. The Act of Union formalized this unwritten tradition and provided for the appointment of Senators to represent the interests of Africans. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, 89.

⁹³ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 17.

⁹⁴ In the absence of an ante-nuptial contract, the husband exercised sole control over the joint marital estate and was the sole legal guardian of all legitimate children. Walker, 18. The application of customary law to African women varied from province to province before 1927. After 1927, African women were deemed perpetual wards of their nearest male relative—husband, father, or son. (Ibid). African women accounted for only 215 of the 19, 636 students who matriculated in 1958, the first year in which separate statistics for education based on race and gender were kept. White women accounted for 7,563 matriculants. *Union Statistics for 50 Years*, Tables E-13 to E-22, cited in Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 19 n. 13.

⁹⁵ Louise Vincent, “A Cake of Soap: The Volkesmoeder Ideology and Afrikaner Women’s Campaign for the Vote,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 32, no. 1 (1999): 2. The WCTU represented five thousand white women and had both Coloured and African branches. Walker, “The Women’s Suffrage Movement,” in Walker, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa*, 333.

English-speaking women, who like the Women's Defense of the Constitution League, were "imbued with a strong sense of Christian duty and women's higher moral purpose."⁹⁶

The political union of the four provinces into a white state in 1910 did not establish unity even among the two white communities, whose ideological arguments, according to Robert Ross, "centered upon the content of South African nationality... [providing] the opportunity for latent conflicts to become manifest."⁹⁷ The first Prime Minister, Louis Botha and his chief deputy, Interior Minister, Jan Smuts, shared a white integrationist vision of South Africa which favored the equal rights of individual whites regardless of their ethnic origin but discouraged any claim of "group rights" by any one group.⁹⁸ J.B.M. Hertzog, Minister of Justice in Botha's cabinet, feared that Botha's white integrationist policy would lead to the destruction of Afrikaners as a people. He argued, "Community life in South Africa flows in two streams—the English-speaking stream and the Dutch-speaking stream, each stream with its own language, its own way of life, its

⁹⁶ Walker, "The Women's Suffrage Movement," 320. In 1904, middle-class Afrikaner women established the *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* (ACVV) which focused on reform and uplift of poor whites. Marijke du Toit asserts that records of their meetings "reveal how the discursive threads of Afrikaner nationalism were woven into the fabric of their communication." Marijke du Toit, "The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: *Volkesmoeders* and the ACVV, 1904-1929," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29, no.1 (March 2003): 159. By the 1920's the ACVV openly advocated for white women's suffrage in support of Hertzog's project to entrench the political power of Afrikaners by diluting the power of the black vote in the Cape Province.

⁹⁷ Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, 91.

⁹⁸ T. Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 75. Botha was the former commander of the Transvaal Boers in the South African War of 1899-1902. Smuts was also a former Boer general. Botha had been elected by a loose coalition of Afrikaner-based parties which counted many English speakers among their supporters. The coalition under which Botha was elected Prime Minister consisted of the South African Party in the Cape, *Het Volk* in the Transvaal, and J.B.M. Hertzog's *Orangia Unie* in the Free State. When these parties joined to form the South African Party in 1911, approximately 25% of the founding delegates were English-speakers. The main opposition party was the Unionist Party, a staunchly pro-imperialist party of English-speakers. Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners, Biography of a People* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 356-357.

own great men, heroic deeds, and noble characters...”⁹⁹ Variations of the integrationist sentiments of Botha and Smuts and the two streams sentiments of Hertzog influenced white political ideology throughout the first half of the twentieth century. However, regardless of their ideological differences, all white political parties shared a vision of white dominance over the black majority in South Africa. They were committed to a vision of white supremacy in which white men ruled the nation and profited from the South African economy by controlling African labour and limiting African access to land.¹⁰⁰ As Timothy Keegan has observed, “White supremacy generally implied the domination of the white male as the supreme evolutionary exemplar of civilization...the ideology of racial dominance was inseparable from issues of male power.”¹⁰¹ As we shall see in Chapter 3, the Black Sash notion of political morality challenged the hegemony of a racialized patriarchal vision of white supremacy by issuing a moral call to women expressed in the language of Christianity and motherism to oppose the deprivation of rights of all segments of the population under apartheid.¹⁰² However, the issue of whether the Black Sash should focus on unity among whites or on specific injustices of apartheid

⁹⁹ Hertzog formed the first incarnation of the National Party in 1914 to represent the interests of petite bourgeois and working class Afrikaans-speaking whites who felt that the government favored the interests of English-speaking whites and neglected their interests. Hertzog’s National Party also appealed to those who were still embittered over the South African War and who resented South Africa’s entry into WWI on the side of Britain and her allies. Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, 358-360; Robert Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, 91-92.

¹⁰⁰ Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Apartheid, Democracy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 37, 54; Aran S. McKinnon, *The Making of South Africa: Culture and Politics* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2004), 174-175; Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 408-409.

¹⁰¹ Timothy Keegan, “Gender, Degeneration and Sexual Danger: Imagining Race and Class in South Africa, ca. 1912,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27 no. 3 (September 2001): 461.

¹⁰² See for example The Black Sash, “Statement on Policy of the Black Sash,” (26 March 1956). Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3.

remained an underlying tension among the branches of the Black Sash throughout the 1950's.

Segregation developed as government policy during the first two decades of the twentieth century; a time of social and economic upheaval for all segments of the South African population. As Dubow and Beinart argue, "social divisions which had existed in South Africa since the advent of European settlement in the seventeenth century took on an increasingly rigid character."¹⁰³ Segregation entrenched white supremacy by promoting white privilege and limiting the rights of blacks. The 1911 Native's Labour Regulation Act essentially nationalized the conditions under which African men could work subjecting African men engaged in migrant labour to passes.¹⁰⁴ The Native's Land Act first proposed in 1911 and passed in 1913, limited African ownership of land to seven percent of the country designated as "African Reserves" and required African sharecroppers to recompense landowners with labour rather than money.¹⁰⁵ By regulating African urban employment, the white parliament hoped to establish a permanent African migrant labour force to serve white mining and industrial capital, supply white farmers

¹⁰³ Dubow and Beinart define Segregation as "the name coined in early twentieth century South Africa for the set of government policies and social practices which sought to regulate the relationship between white and black...Elements of segregation had precursors...but it was only in the twentieth century that the ideology of segregation was refined and the reach of the system fully extended." Dubow and Beinart, "The Historiography of Segregation and Apartheid" in Dubow and Beinart, *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*, 1.

¹⁰⁴ The Native's Labour Regulation Act, envisioned recruitment of unskilled African men in rural areas where they would be fingerprinted and issued a pass allowing them to enter urban areas. If African men broke their employment contract or stayed in an urban area beyond the term of the contract, they were subject to arrest. The Mines and Works Act passed the same year, restricted skilled jobs in mines and on railways to whites. Nancy Clark and William Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2004), 21.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 22. Robert Ross notes that white farmers thought black sharecroppers looked on white landowners as equals. This was interpreted by whites as "a subversion of the hierarchies which whites propagated." The Land Act, Ross argues, "... [redefined] all black's on white owned land as the farmer's servants, and thus as subject to discriminatory master and servant legislation." Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, 96.

with cheap labourers, and limit the number of Africans competing with white workers.¹⁰⁶

By restricting African land ownership so drastically, the white parliament intended to limit the number of Africans streaming into urban areas where the white population clustered.¹⁰⁷

In 1911, white English-speaking women organized the Women's Enfranchisement Association of the Union of South Africa (WEAU) which advocated the enfranchisement of women under the same terms as were applied to men; a universal franchise for white women throughout South Africa and a qualified franchise for black women in the Cape.¹⁰⁸ However, suffrage for white women was contingent on the usefulness of their vote to maintain the white state. The WEAU's early advocacy of suffrage for women on the same grounds as the enfranchisement of men conflicted with the political structure of white supremacy because enfranchisement of black women would increase the power of the black vote in the Cape.¹⁰⁹ Although the WEAU attempted to reach out to Afrikaans-speaking women using strategies which would be recycled by the Women's Defense of the Constitution League in 1955, the WEAU failed to appeal to most Afrikaner women as a result of its early advocacy of a qualified non-

¹⁰⁶ Ross, 96

¹⁰⁷ Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 39. The African urban population had risen by 71.4% between 1904 and 1921 as compared with a rise of 50.9% among the urban white population in the same period. The Land Act was not immediately enforceable across the Union however as it was declared unconstitutional in the Cape because it made it impossible for Africans to acquire property necessary to become voters. Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 56. This is one reason why the National Party sought to remove the non-racial franchise in the Cape.

¹⁰⁸ Walker, "The Women's Suffrage Movement," in Walker, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa*, 314.

¹⁰⁹ In five constituencies in the Cape, Africans constituted almost half of the voters. Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, 1. Cheryl Walker notes that it was "...largely because the question of the [women's] franchise raised such explosive issues about black political rights...that the enfranchisement of white women was delayed" Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 21.

racial franchise in the Cape.¹¹⁰ Similarly, in 1956 when the Black Sash broadened its focus from opposing the Senate Act to opposing unjust laws directed at all segments of the population, membership among Afrikaner women fell dramatically.¹¹¹

In response to the exclusion of blacks from the constitutional convention in 1910 and the influx control and labour laws proposed in 1911, elite mission-educated African men formed the South African Natives National Congress (SANNC) in 1912.¹¹² Tom Lodge characterized the founding of the SANNC as the result "...of the ascendancy in middle-class African circles of the contention that African interests could best be promoted, not through sympathetic intermediaries, but rather by Africans themselves."¹¹³ Increased independence among African political activists after 1912 coincided with the revolt of black clergy in white missionary societies and the founding of Independent

¹¹⁰The WEAU magazine, *The Flashlight*, was published in both English and Afrikaans, accepted contributions in both languages and was distributed in both urban and rural areas. Its press campaigns targeted both English and Afrikaner newspapers. Vincent, "A Cake of Soap," 3; Walker, "The Women's Suffrage Movement," in Walker, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa*, 314. Similarly the Black Sash attempted to reach out to Afrikaner women by publishing *The Black Sash* in both English and Afrikaans throughout the 1950's and 60's. The Manifesto of the Women's Defense of the Constitution League expressly invited Afrikaans-speaking women to join the Black Sash. In the 1920's, middle-class Afrikaner Women were more attracted to the ACVV which focused on reform and uplift of poor whites and advocated suffrage for white women only. Marijke du Toit, "The Domesticity of Afrikaner Nationalism: Volkesmoeders and the ACVV, 1904-1929," 160. As one prominent Afrikaner woman testified before the Select Committee on the Enfranchisement of Women in 1926, "I would rather forfeit the vote myself indefinitely than that our white civilization should be placed in danger by extending the vote to native women." Minutes of Evidence, 1925 Select Committee on the Enfranchisement of Women, 68 (1926), quoted in Vincent, "A Cake of Soap," 4.

¹¹¹Jean Sinclair, "Statement on Policy of the Black Sash," (26 March 1956), Black Sash Society Papers. Members believed that the decline in membership was partly due to the belief fostered by the National Party that the Black Sash advocated a universal non-racial franchise. The Black Sash leadership also understood that the membership decline was due in part to patriarchal pressure by husbands who were themselves intimidated by political, social and economic pressures. The Black Sash, Minutes of National Council Meeting, Johannesburg 23 July 1956, 50-52, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

¹¹²Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, 1. The SANNC became the African National Congress (ANC) in 1923.

¹¹³Ibid.

African churches.¹¹⁴ As Elphick suggests, “in each denomination there was an undercurrent of tension between non-African missionaries, who clung to their administrative roles, and the African clergy who demanded more authority and independence.”¹¹⁵ The founding of the SANNC and the rising independence of black clergy also coincided with a hysterical wave of Black Peril in 1912-1913.¹¹⁶ Much of this hysteria among whites accompanied claims that African women rather than African men were best suited for domestic labour.¹¹⁷ Keegan connects the Black Peril of 1912-1913 with white male insecurity over social changes wrought by urbanization and industrialization and frames it terms of gender, class, and race. White women were engaging in extra-domestic reform activities, entering professions and increasingly agitating for suffrage. Economic pressures among poor rural Afrikaners necessitated sending girls in increasing numbers to jobs in urban areas where they competed with white men and were brought into closer contact with black men. Black women moving to urban locations resisted proletarianization as domestic servants in white homes by

¹¹⁴ Elphick, “Mission Christianity and Interwar Liberalism,” in Butler, Elphick and Welsh, *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa*, 71.

¹¹⁵ Elphick, 72. The contradictory aims of mission education for African girls as envisioned by their parents on the one hand and white missionary administrators and government officials on the other reflects this tension. Many white missionaries and most government officials viewed education for African girls as “training for entry into domestic service in white homes.” African elites on the other hand, viewed this education as training to become, “fitting wives for educated native men. Deborah Gaitskell, “Housewives, Maids or Mothers: Some Contradictions of Domesticity for Women in Johannesburg, 1903-39, *Journal of African History* 24, no. 2 (1983): 244.

¹¹⁶ Timothy Keegan, “Gender, Degeneration and Sexual Danger: Imagining Race and Class in South Africa, ca.1912” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no.3 (September 2001): 459-477. The hysteria of the black peril was often articulated as the danger of rape posed to the chastity and purity of white women by sexually aggressive African “houseboys.” Keegan shows that the claims of attempted rape and inappropriate contact between black “houseboys” and white women were vastly overstated and were sensationalized by the newspapers. (471).

¹¹⁷ Keegan, 468. See also, Deborah Gaitskell, “Christian Compounds for Girls: Church Hostels for African Women in Johannesburg, 1907-1970” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 6, no.1 (October 1979): 47.

operating shebeens, taking in washing, and engaging in other paid activity, including prostitution.¹¹⁸ “At one level,” Keegan suggests, “the threat [of the Black Peril] grew out of the breaching of cultural divides between coloniser and colonised, and the rising tide of black assertiveness and political and economic aspiration.”¹¹⁹ At another level, “It was an affirmation of masculine identity, and of the social order of gender roles in a society built on patriarchy and racial exclusion.”¹²⁰ During the 1950’s the Black Sash challenged claims of “black peril” as a basis for white supremacy because it incorporated “fear” as a basis for policy.¹²¹

In 1913, long before the formation of the Black Sash, African women in Bloemfontein challenged the racialized patriarchy of the white state and the inability of African men to confront state oppression on their behalf. As the hysteria of the Black Peril peaked, the Bloemfontein municipality issued permit requirements for African women in the Waaihoek location, primarily to force them into labour on white farms or domestic service in white homes.¹²² Despite being denied full membership in the ANC

¹¹⁸ Ibid. White women criticized white men for their sexual liaisons with black women and some suggested that white men should be prosecuted on the same basis as black men for inter-racial rape. (467).

¹¹⁹ Keegan, “Gender, Degeneration and Sexual Danger,” 474.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ For example in a circular entitled, “Attitude to the Africans,” issued in 1956, the Black Sash condemned the concept of white supremacy as based on fear. The Black Sash Circular no. 8 “Attitude to the Africans,” (13 July 1956), 2. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 5. An article in *The Black Sash* in 1957, entitled “What Fear Can Do,” described a confrontation between the Black Sash and five young white men at a public meeting where the young men expressed their “fear” that the Black Sash were inciting Africans to live with them on equal terms. The author reported, “...every word spoken by this man was a word of fear and hate...All other considerations were lost in this one fearful preoccupation—the terrible, the ghastly, the frightful black man!” Implying that fear was emasculating, the author went on to comment sadly, “It was shocking to find young Afrikaners, descendants of a proud and courageous people such shaking cowards...what deliberate frightening of children had been going on when five stalwart young men could stand in public and admit their shattering fears.” The article ended with a mother’s lament, “Oh, the sad young men of today and tomorrow.” “What Fear Can Do,” *The Black Sash* 2 no.3 (April 1957), 7.

¹²² Wells, *We Now Demand!* 24.

until 1944, African women successfully organized resistance to Bloemfontein's attempt to extend pass laws to women, demonstrating their ability to organize political activity independently of black men. The women's campaign was led by educated Christian women who viewed pass laws for women as an assault on their respectability and interference with their duties as mothers to provide for their families.¹²³ They organized demonstrations and engaged in passive resistance by tearing up passes and hurling them at police, vowing to "suffer untold agonies and imprisonment" before they would accept passes.¹²⁴ As the anti-pass campaign spread to other municipal areas, Dr. Aburahman of the APO observed that men, "might well hide our faces in shame and ponder in some secluded spot over the heroic stand made by Africa's daughters."¹²⁵

Deborah Gaitskell points out that the development of *manyamos* (African women's prayer unions) may have influenced the 1913 women's anti-pass campaign. The first *manyamos* arose out of regular devotional meetings held by white missionary women with African women. They came together, Gaitskell says, "...explicitly as mothers."¹²⁶ Both the white missionary women who supervised the *manyamos* and the

¹²³ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 28. See also, Gaitskell, "Housewives, Maids or Mothers," 244. For a detailed examination of the women's 1913 Bloemfontein anti-pass campaign, see, Wells, *We Now Demand: The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa*, 32-49.

¹²⁴ Wells, *We Now Demand!* 40. Two hundred women marched through Bloemfontein demanding to see the mayor on 28 May, 1913. He refused to see them until the following day when he offered to ask police to be "more considerate in the way they went about making arrests." After eighty-four women were arrested for tearing up their passes, six hundred women demonstrated outside the magistrate's court during the hearing. When police attempted to break up the demonstration the women brandished sticks and hurled stones shouting, "We have done with pleading, we now demand!" (41).

¹²⁵ APO, 28 June 1913, cited in Wells, 43. In March 1914 a commission appointed by Prime Minister Botha to study the issue of municipal pass law produced a draft bill which gave the Governor-General of each province the power to revoke municipal pass laws and the municipality stopped enforcing them. Wells, 48. The bill never became law because South Africa entered WWI and the women dropped their protests when the SANNCU vowed to give up political confrontations during the war. (49).

¹²⁶ Gaitskell, "Devout Domesticity? A Century of African Women's Christianity in South Africa," in Walker, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa*, 251.

African women who led them, “sought to reinforce values of middle class domesticity and offer support to motherhood in a time of economic and social upheaval.”¹²⁷ The “ideology of domesticity,” she argues, “was not simply a missionary imposition, alien to the needs of black Christians...[it] accorded prestige, respect and power to married homemakers, while Christian associations gave them practical support in defense of a family form under threat of disintegration.”¹²⁸ As we shall see, during the 1950’s African women’s protests against the extension of passes to women framed in terms of their respectability and duties as mothers to protect their families persuaded white women in the Black Sash to oppose pass laws for African women on these same grounds.¹²⁹

Segregation, Mission Christians, White Women’s Suffrage and the Failed Promise of Liberalism: 1920-1936

By the 1920’s, many liberals and mission Christians had discarded the 19th century Victorian Cape Liberal paradigm of “civilised rights for civilised men” in favour of a group adaptationist paradigm which embraced segregation of Africans in rural reserves and renewal of traditional patriarchal structures by chiefs and headmen as a means to control, develop and protect Africans.¹³⁰ The rapid pace of industrialization in the interwar period exacerbated existing divisions of race and class. Disputes between

¹²⁷ Gaitskell, “Devout Domesticity?” in Walker, *Women and Resistance in Southern Africa*, 252. As Africans established independent churches, *manyamos* developed their own organizational structures in which women exercised independence from both traditional and western constructs of domesticity. (264-265).

¹²⁸ Gaitskell, “Housewives, Maids or Mothers,” 255.

¹²⁹ “Why Passes?” *The Black Sash*, III no. 19 (June/July 1959); The Black Sash National Council discussed reasons African women in Johannesburg and Cape Town courted arrest to resist passes at their meeting in June, 1958. They approved using bail funds to assist women to get out of jail if the women asked for bail assistance and they determined that she had acted in “good conscience.” *The Black Sash*, Minutes of National Council Meeting, Johannesburg, June 1958, 43-46. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

¹³⁰ Paul Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience*, 59.

mine owners and mine workers on the Rand were complicated by racial divisions among the mine workers.¹³¹ In 1919, Cape Town dockworkers formed the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) which combined with other black workers' unions in 1920 and boasted a membership of more than one hundred thousand workers.¹³² Competition for jobs between skilled African and white workers coupled with poor wages led to strikes by African mineworkers in 1920 and the Rand Revolt of white mineworkers in 1922.¹³³ The white parliament dealt with this unrest by enacting legislation to enforce systematic segregation in jobs, trade unions, and urban areas. The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1923 excluded Africans from the definition of "employee".¹³⁴ The Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 required all African men to carry passes, codifying the recommendation of the Stallard Commission that "the Native should only be allowed to enter urban areas, which are essentially the white man's creation, when he is willing to enter and minister to the needs of the white man and

¹³¹ Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 57. The South African Labour Party was created in 1909 to represent the interests of white mineworkers. The Labour Party won the highest number of seats in the Transvaal Provincial elections of 1914—an event which seriously concerned mine owners. (Ibid).

¹³² Worden, 60. The ICU eclipsed for a time, the influence of the ANC because it enabled workers to organize to fight local issues under a national leadership. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, 99-100

¹³³ Belinda Bozzoli also notes that white English-speaking leaders in mining and industry were concerned about the potential for inter-racial worker solidarity. Bozzoli, *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class: Capital and Ideology in South Africa 1890-1903* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1981), 127. One commentator wrote critically of the white labor movement in 1914, "...they have been guilty of making overtures to native labour to join with them while at the same time... treating special constables as scabs... In a country where the natives outnumber the whites by six to one, the policy has been to keep the natives outside the relations existing between the different sections of the white population. Editorial "The Rise of Labour" *South African Commerce and Manufacturer's Record* 7 (April, 1914), 84 cited in Bozzoli, *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class*, 127. Jeremy Krikler argues that the striking white mine workers in 1922, "did not view African mine workers as responsible for the onslaught on white labour [and viewed] the threats to racial identity and privilege ...as coming not from Africans but from a (white) ruling class." Jeremy Krikler, "The Commandos: The Army of White Labour in South Africa" *Past and Present* 163 (May, 1999): 208.

¹³⁴ Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, 40.

should depart therefore when he ceases to minister.”¹³⁵ In 1924 the Labour Party joined with Hertzog’s National Party to win control of Parliament by forming the “Pact” government to protect “civilized [white] labour” and further entrench segregation as official government policy.¹³⁶ Two primary objectives of the Pact government were rehabilitating poor whites and safeguarding white privilege through disenfranchising Africans.¹³⁷ The government pursued the first objective by strengthening job reservation and influx controls to further segregate Africans into rural reserves as reservoirs of cheap, unskilled labour. The government pursued the second objective by enfranchising white women.

White liberals and Christian missionary administrators generally supported segregation. They claimed that segregation was a policy situated midway between the extremes of those who pleaded for equal treatment of white and black and those who regarded Africans as being biologically and culturally inferior and suited only for manual labour.¹³⁸ Liberals and missionary administrators did not view the problems of urban slums as the product of capitalism but rather as the result of the breakdown of traditional

¹³⁵ Quoted in Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, 40. The Transvaal Local Government Commission of 1921 was popularly known as the Stallard Commission after its chairman, Colonel Stallard (39).

¹³⁶ Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, 114. Hertzog remained Prime Minister from 1924-1939 and segregationist legislation faced minimal opposition from Smuts’ South African Party.

¹³⁷ Hermann Giliomee, “The Non-racial Franchise and Afrikaner and Coloured Identities, 1910-1994,” *African Affairs* 94, no. 375 (April 1995): 199-225, 213.

¹³⁸ C.T. Loram, *The Education of the South African Native* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1917), 17-25. Influential South African liberals who embraced segregation included Howard Pim, C.T. Loram, Maurice Evans, and Edgar Brookes. Saul Dubow, “The Elaboration of Segregationist Ideology,” 149-153.

“tribal” controls when Africans moved to urban areas.¹³⁹ J. Howard Pim, a prominent liberal and Christian embraced segregation of Africans in rural reserves rather than in locations surrounding industrial areas.¹⁴⁰ In 1924 under Hertzog’s patronage, Edgar Brookes published an extensive analysis of segregation in which he described segregation as the duty of the white man, “...to civilize as well as control, to develop as well as protect.”¹⁴¹ Elphick argues, however, that Christian liberals in the early 20th century who embraced segregation did so with the proviso that “native policy would have to be executed justly...and mechanisms of consultation would have to be introduced.”¹⁴² The values of Christian liberals were conceived in individual as well as collective terms and required consultation and the breaching of divides between black and white.¹⁴³ Consequently, the efforts of Christian liberals were focused on encouraging dialogue

¹³⁹ As liberals were committed to the capitalist model of free markets, the question of “how to apply western market economics in a different cultural and economic situation became an important subject of discussions,” according to Paul Rich. *White Power and the Liberal Conscience*, 34. The Phelps-Stokes commission which toured South Africa in 1921 collecting information about “African education,” connected South African concerns with “detribalization” to American ideas about racial differentiation. C.T. Loram’s argument that “education for Africans should be directed toward the objective of resisting cultural assimilation with whites... and geared toward industrial training in the reserves,” Rich contends, was complimentary to the American model of the Tuskegee Institute (19).

¹⁴⁰ Saul Dubow suggests that Pim’s arguments favoring segregation were intended to demonstrate that “territorial segregation was compatible with (rather than necessary to) the development of industry, and that such a strategy would help to ensure the preservation of social order” by strengthening tribal structures. Dubow, “The Elaboration of Segregationist Ideology,” in Beinart and Dubow, *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*, 149. Pim, Loram, Brookes and other prominent liberals adhered to paternalist ideals of trusteeship which were based on three fundamental principles: the white man must govern; parliament must delegate power to experts on the “natives” and must refrain from undue interference; separation of the races is necessary to prevent race deterioration and to give both races an opportunity to build up and develop their race and culture. (150-151).

¹⁴¹ Edgar Brookes, *The History of Native Policy in South Africa from 1830 to the Present Day* (Cape Town: 1924), quoted in Dubow, 153.

¹⁴² Dubow, “The Elaboration of Segregationist Ideology,” in Beinart and Dubow, *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*, 151.

¹⁴³ Elphick, “Mission Christianity and Interwar Liberalism,” in Elphick, Butler and, Welsh, *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa*, 74-75. As expressed by Jan Hofmeyr, “the central truth...is that of the fatherhood of God, carrying with it the implication of the brotherhood of man, irrespective of race, creed, or colour...”

between white and black through joint councils and trying to influence 'native policy' through appeals to enlightened and sympathetic officials.¹⁴⁴ However, their emphasis was on influencing government policy rather than opposing it.¹⁴⁵ During the 1920's and 30's white missionary administrators relied on the advice of academics and professionals to promote a social gospel which focused on the health, education, and welfare of Africans as a group.¹⁴⁶ As a result, the white missionary administrators and the liberal professionals with whom they consulted, rarely began their thinking "...with abstract principles and [proceeded] to a critique of existing or proposed policy. Much more typically, they began with a problem...and proceeded to debate its solution."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Elphick, 66-67.

¹⁴⁵ The strategies of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) founded in 1929 and dominated by male liberals associated with mission Christians, Elphick contends, sprang from the historical cooperation between "enlightened" officials within the state bureaucracy and missionary administrators who were considered experts on the "natives." (70-71).

¹⁴⁶ The attention of white missionary administrators to social problems also accompanied the revolt of black clergy whose focus was on saving souls. Elphick suggests that white missionary administrators justified their continued roles, in part, as a result of their focus on the social gospel and their connections with government bureaucrats. (72).

¹⁴⁷ Elphick, "Mission Christianity and Interwar Liberalism," 73. The SAIRR was formed by eight men who met at the home of the American missionary, Ray Phillips. Six of these men worked closely with missionaries, and were personally deeply pious. They included, J.D. Rheinalt-Jones, Howard Pim, Edgar Brookes, J. du Plessis, D.D.T. Jabavu, and C.T. Loram. (67). In 1933, Rheinalt-Jones represented himself as a link to all the missions. He represented the SAIRR as a useful consultative agency "without being either a government department or a missionary institution." Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience*, 43. By the 1950's several women had been elected President of the SAIRR. Agnes Hoernle was twice elected President of the SAIRR before 1955 and Dr. Ellen Hellman who was also a member of the Black Sash was President of the SAIRR from 1954-1956. Although there were close associations between the SAIRR and the Black Sash, the policy of the Black Sash was geared more to action than to research. While the Black Sash remained publicly associated with the Bishop's Committee in 1958-1960, the SAIRR withdrew because it objected to participation of the COD on the committee. There were subsequent diversions in policy throughout the years. The most notable of these is the critique by the SAIRR of the Black Sash involvement with the UDF during the mid 1980's - 1990's. This dispute became the subject of *The Liberal Slideaway*, by Jill Wentzel a member of the SAIRR who resigned from the Black Sash and her position as editor of *The Black Sash*. Wentzel criticized the Black Sash for their stinging critique of government policies (especially government sponsored violence) while muting their critique of UDF policies and African violence. See Jill Wentzel, *The Liberal Slideaway*. (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1995).

The moral critique of apartheid by the Black Sash departed from the paradigm of earlier mission Christian administrators because the Black Sash started with abstract principles founded upon Christian beliefs in the value of individuals combined with universal principles of individual liberty and equality before the law and applied them to specific government policies.¹⁴⁸ Circular No. 8, “Attitude to the Africans,” illustrates the application of Christianity and liberalism to the notion of political morality. The circular makes the following argument:

The principles that should underlie our attitude to the non-European people are the principles of Western Civilization. The essence of Western Civilization is the belief in the value of man. This is a combination of the ethics of Christianity and democracy. Christianity believes in the equal value of every human soul and that every man must be enabled to live a life worthy of man. Democracy puts first the equal importance of every man. It is a system of government evolved to guarantee the rights and liberties to every individual. If you believe in Western Civilization, you must divide people on the basis of standards of civilization and not on the basis of colour.¹⁴⁹

Circular No. 8 also demonstrates significant differences between the Black Sash notion of political morality which rejected the ideology of white supremacy and the paternalistic attitudes of Howard Pim and Edgar Brookes who embraced the “group paradigm” of separate development. The Circular concludes as follows:

By talking of “White Civilization” you deny Western Civilization, because the basis of “White Civilization” is that any man with a white skin is

¹⁴⁸In her speech on the new policy of the Black Sash in Johannesburg on 26 March, 1956, Jean Sinclair described the meaning of political morality. Jean Sinclair, “Statement on Policy of the Black Sash, 2. Black Sash Society Papers.

¹⁴⁹The Black Sash, Circular No. 8 “Attitude to the Africans,” 1. Black Sash Society Papers. This Circular also reflects the perspectives of the Black Sash which accepted progressive development among Africans in the tradition of 19th Century Cape Liberalism of the “Civilizing Mission.” The Circular contends, “When the white man first came to South Africa, there was a reasonable basis for the assumption that civilized men in South Africa could only be white. The relationship between white and black was only that of master and servant. (1).

superior to any man with a skin of another colour...Black men are treated as a mass without separate individuality, yet we have seen that the basis for Western Civilization is the value of every individual and we are denying this by our continued regard of all Africans as a group.¹⁵⁰

Reflecting the liberal and Mission Christian tradition of inter-racial consultation, *The Black Sash* included articles from prominent African and white clergy and leading liberal intellectuals who critiqued specific apartheid legislation because it violated universal liberal principles of liberty and equality before the law, and the Christian principle of the value of individuals regardless of race.¹⁵¹ Dissatisfied with mere consultation and education however, the Black Sash publicly demonstrated their opposition to specific apartheid legislation and engaged in practical strategies of resistance through advice offices and pass court monitoring.

In 1924, General Hertzog announced his support for women's suffrage but he insisted that suffrage for women would have to wait until the issue of the Cape franchise was resolved.¹⁵² Hertzog expected white women to understand that women's enfranchisement under the same terms as men was contrary to the interests of white supremacy because it would dilute the power of the white vote in the Cape.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ "Attitude to the Africans," 2.

¹⁵¹ See for example, "Fact or Fiction," *The Black Sash* II no. 4 (May 1957), 9; "An Inhuman Bill," *The Black Sash* II no. 4 (May 1957), 1-3; Rev. Dennis E. Hurley, "South Africa from the Outside," *The Black Sash* II no. 9 (November, 1957), 8-10; W.B. Ngakane, "Passes and Africans," *The Black Sash* II no. 9 (November, 1957), 5-6; D. Rankin, "And He Set A Little Child Before Him," *The Black Sash*, II no. 10 (December 1957), 6; D. Rankin, "The Secret of Our Strength," *The Black Sash* III no. 3 (February, 1958), 1-3. "The Secret of Our Strength," *The Black Sash* III no. 7/8 (June-July, 1958), 1-3. Each of these articles referenced Christianity or Christian principles as a basis for opposing passes, the Group Areas Act, or the Native Laws Amendment Act.

¹⁵² In 1919 the principle of women's suffrage won a majority in the House of Assembly by two SAP votes. Walker, "The Women's Suffrage Movement," 333. Later that same year both the Unionist Party and the SAP passed motions in favour of women's suffrage, making the NP the lone hold-out.

¹⁵³ Walker, "The Women's Suffrage Movement," in Walker, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa*, 335.

Significantly, although blacks were denied suffrage in the Northern provinces, they had become a force to be reckoned with in close elections in the Cape prior to 1930.¹⁵⁴ In the 1924 election, the NP won only 11 more seats than the South African Party (SAP). In the Cape Province the SAP enjoyed a 7 seat majority over the NP.¹⁵⁵ African children outnumbered white children in the Cape by a two to one margin and experts predicted that the African vote was expected to double in the next 15 years.¹⁵⁶ Unless something changed, *Die Burgher* observed that an electoral advantage in the Cape Provincial Council would enable black voters to decide the future of white children's education.¹⁵⁷ More crucial for the NP leadership in the near term however, was that black voters generally voted for the SAP.¹⁵⁸ Many of the questions directed to women before the 1926 Select Committee on Women's Enfranchisement related to women's attitudes about suffrage for black women and illustrated the fears of whites about the power of the black vote in the Cape. Aletta Nel, who testified before the Committee, demonstrated her understanding of this gendered racial conundrum when she was asked if she supported extending the franchise to black women. She answered, "As a woman, sir, yes...but as a South African person, I feel it would be wiser if we gave the vote to the European women only."¹⁵⁹ By 1926, the WEAU understood that unless they abandoned their support for a qualified non-racial franchise for black women in the Cape, suffrage for white women

¹⁵⁴ In 1910, Coloured and African voters together comprised 9.6 percent of the vote. By 1921, the black vote had escalated to 20.8 percent. In the nine electoral districts of the Cape Peninsula, the black vote (the overwhelming majority of which was Coloured) comprised over a quarter of the electorate. Giliomee, "The Non-Racial Franchise and Afrikaner and Coloured Identities," 205

¹⁵⁵ Giliomee, 215.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ *Die Burger*, 23 May, 1929 cited in Giliomee, 215.

¹⁵⁸ Giliomee, 216.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 24.

would not pass. As Mrs. Grant testified, “Well, in this country it is no use talking of justice.... Such native policy as we have is based on injustice.... Should we women be so wonderfully just, when...white men in the country are not entirely just to native men?”¹⁶⁰

In 1927 the NP Cape Congress unanimously adopted a motion approving white women’s suffrage and a women’s enfranchisement bill received majority support in committee after it was amended to apply to white women only. The bill did not proceed to a vote however, because General Hertzog personally intervened to kill the bill.¹⁶¹ Walker argues that Hertzog wanted to wait until after the general election of 1929 because several previous attempts to garner the two thirds majority necessary to disenfranchise Africans had failed.¹⁶² Hertzog hoped to use the threat of African voting power in the Cape Province and the promise that he would support women’s suffrage to ensure an NP victory in the election.¹⁶³ In February 1929, Hertzog proposed two interdependent bills; the first to disenfranchise Africans and the second to extend voting rights to Coloured men in the Northern provinces.¹⁶⁴ These bills failed and the NP in the Cape argued that racial equality with Africans threatened Coloured rights as Africans were taking jobs which had previously been exclusively theirs.¹⁶⁵ Coloured voters helped to return the NP to power in the election of 1929 and the NP won seats in Paarl and

¹⁶⁰ “Report of the Select Committee on Women’s Enfranchisement Bill,” 1926 quoted in Walker, “The Women’s Suffrage Movement,” in Walker, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa*, 335.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Walker, “The Women’s Suffrage Movement,” 338.

¹⁶³ Giliomee, “The Non-racial Franchise and Afrikaner and Coloured Identities,” 215.

¹⁶⁴ Giliomee, 217. Hertzog and the NP favored extending the vote to both white and Coloured women in 1929 because, Hertzog argued, “It would be foolish to drive the Coloured people into the arms of the enemies of the Europeans....” Hertzog’s fear was supported by a commission report that found that the Coloured elite identified with “European values and standards”, but they also shared with Africans, “...the lot of a suppressed people with whom in many ways they can make common cause.”

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Stellenbosch from the SAP with support from Coloured voters.¹⁶⁶ Once the NP was returned to power, however, Hertzog proceeded to keep his promise to white women and to forsake his commitment to Coloured voters. In 1930, Hertzog guided a bill through Parliament which provided for a universal franchise for white women only. He claimed that MP's from the Northern provinces would not approve extending the vote to Coloured women when they had refused to enfranchise Coloured men in 1929.¹⁶⁷ In its victory issue *The Flashlight* rationalized white women's capitulation to the racialized patriarchy of the state as it observed, "... enfranchised women will have far greater influence in matters affecting the interests of the non-European section of the population than they had when unenfranchised."¹⁶⁸

In 1931, Parliament passed the Franchise Laws Amendment Act which introduced universal suffrage for white men but retained the existing property qualifications for Coloured and African men.¹⁶⁹ Coupled with the enfranchisement of white women, the Franchise Laws Amendment Act reduced the black vote to six percent of the Cape electorate.¹⁷⁰ In 1934, Hertzog's National Party joined with Jan Smuts' South African

¹⁶⁶ Giliomee, 218. However, the Coloured voters in the rest of the Cape Province were not so easily swayed. The NP received less than 10 percent of the Coloured votes in urban districts in the Cape. Giliomee notes that "by contrast, more than 60 percent of SAP support in these districts came from Coloured and Africans." (Ibid).

¹⁶⁷ Hertzog also claimed that no one could agree on a definition of a "Coloured" person. Giliomee, 218-219. The bill to extend the Coloured vote in the Northern provinces introduced "revision boards" which were intended to provide a list of Coloured voters and remove Africans from the rolls. In addition to opposition from whites in the northern provinces, Coloured voters in the Cape opposed the revision boards after it was determined that they would be required to appear before the revision boards to be certified as "Coloured" in order to vote. (217).

¹⁶⁸ *The Flashlight*, July 1930, 1 quoted in Walker, "The Women's Suffrage Movement," in Walker, *Women and Resistance in Southern Africa*, 337.

¹⁶⁹ Giliomee, "The Non-racial Franchise and Afrikaner and Coloured Identities," 219.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

Party to create the United South African National Party.¹⁷¹ The United Party (UP), as it was popularly known, provided Hertzog with the two-thirds majority necessary to pass the Representation of Natives Act in 1936 which deprived qualified African men of their right to vote in national and provincial elections.¹⁷² In return for suffrage, white women collaborated with the racialized patriarchy of the white state to maintain and strengthen the political structures of white supremacy by disenfranchising African men and diluting the electoral power of Coloured men. As we shall see in Chapters Three and Four many white women in the Black Sash were determined not to bow to patriarchy or to compromise their principles as did their forebears in the suffrage movement even though it meant opposing their own political party and losing members. The UP wanted the Black Sash to disband after their protest against the Senate Act failed in 1956. When the Black Sash refused to disband the UP engaged in an ongoing strategy to undermine the organization and force the Black Sash to go into permanent recess.

¹⁷¹ Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, 117. The United Party was formed as a party of unity in the face of the economic crises of the Great Depression and in particular over whether South Africa should abandon the gold standard. The National Party which assumed power in 1948 was founded as the *Gesuiwerde* (Purified) National Party by D.F. Malan and eighteen members of Parliament following the creation of the United Party in 1934. When Smuts led the United Party in following Great Britain into WWII, Hertzog resigned from the United Party and re-joined the National Party in 1939 (118). See also Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 349, 407-408. Giliomee characterizes the prevailing attitude of the United Party as “a predominant sense of national unity based on the equality of the two white communities and a mutual recognition of their distinctive cultural inheritance.” (407). Malan however, depicted the United Party as a bulwark of “imperialism and capitalism.” (409).

¹⁷² This act created a separate voting roll in which African men elected a Natives Representative Council, dominated by chiefs and headmen, empowered to elect white “Native Representatives” to parliament. Gail Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 34 n. 18; Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, 83. The size of the Native Reserves was increased to 13% of the country. The Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 which increased the size of the African Reserves provided funds for Chiefs to purchase land from Africans who held freehold title. Land purchases by chiefs limited the ability of individual Africans to engage in commercial rather than subsistence farming. The Cape province where the Native’s Land Act had been found unconstitutional because it limited African men’s ability to obtain the property necessary to meet franchise requirements was now also subject to the reserve system as African men had no franchise rights after 1936. (66).

The Juggernaut of White Supremacy: Early Influx Control Policy Under Apartheid and Increasing African Militancy: 1936-1954

Having disenfranchised African men and vastly reduced the power of Coloured voters in the Cape, Hertzog turned his attention to controlling African Urbanization. In 1937 Parliament passed the Native Laws Amendment Act (NLAA) which empowered the Native Affairs Department (NAD) to move Africans out of an urban area if they were deemed surplus to the reasonable labour requirements of the area.”¹⁷³ The NLAA proved ineffective because municipalities retained independent authority to issue passes. As the municipalities and the NAD operated independently of each other, African men entered urban areas without permission of the NAD, obtained employment and secured a pass from municipal authorities entitling them to remain in urban centers.¹⁷⁴ According to municipal authorities who were alarmed by the increase in African urbanization during the war years, the situation was compounded by the influx of African women who remained outside administrative controls because they were excluded from pass laws.¹⁷⁵ For their part, African women relied on their identities as mothers and their responsibility to provide for their children to confer moral legitimacy on their increasing urbanization and politicization.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, 43.

¹⁷⁴ Posel, 45.

¹⁷⁵ Posel, 46. The Association of Administrators of non-European Affairs represented municipal authorities and urged the NAD to adopt a system of pass laws for African women in 1945.

¹⁷⁶ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 12-13. When the ANC called the All Africa Conference in December, 1935 in response to the passage of the Hertzog Bills, Mrs. Minnie Bhola, President of the Bantu Women’s League, reminded the men of the important role of women in a national liberation movement declaring, “No people or nation can rise to its legitimate aspirations without the aid of the women.” Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter, “We Opened the Road for You, You Must Go Forward’: ANC Women’s Struggles, 1912-1982. *Feminist Review* 12 (1982): 20.

Influx control became one of the central controversies among white voters leading up to the election of 1948. The UP's strategy for dealing with influx control was based on the findings of the Fagan Commission in 1946.¹⁷⁷ The Fagan Commission Report concluded that a permanent African population was "simply [a fact] which we have to face as such."¹⁷⁸ The Fagan Commission urged that African men be permitted to settle permanently in the cities along with their families arguing that urbanization did not require African political enfranchisement because their political aspirations could be limited to municipal bodies operated separately from white municipal government.¹⁷⁹ The National Party's policy toward influx control was contained in the Sauer Report of 1947 commissioned "to develop the outlines of an Afrikaner Nationalist blueprint for a white future under an apartheid system."¹⁸⁰ The Sauer Report incorporated the contradictory policies of "total apartheid," advocated by the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (SABRA), and "practical apartheid," advocated by the South African Agricultural Union (SAAU). Both SABRA and the SAAU accepted the principle that the "political disenfranchisement of Africans was an essential condition of renewed white political supremacy."¹⁸¹ However, SABRA argued that Africans should be segregated into their own polities based in the reserves because it would be immoral to incorporate Africans in urban areas but deny them the vote. Moreover, it would occasion, "increasingly

¹⁷⁷ Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, 48.

¹⁷⁸ The Fagan Commission reasoned that overpopulation of the African reserves coupled with the requirements of industrial development which necessitated an urban reservoir of African labour made total separation of the races, "unfeasible." (Ibid).

¹⁷⁹ Posel, 48.

¹⁸⁰ Posel, 49.

¹⁸¹ Posel, 51.

vociferous and powerful African opposition.”¹⁸² SABRA’s argument recognized that reducing the pool of urban African labour would entail a hardship on mining and manufacturing interests but contended that this hardship could be alleviated by mechanization and importing white workers.¹⁸³ The SAAU argument, on the other hand, supported a permanent, stable urbanized African population. The SAAU claimed that economic integration, essential to industrial development, did not require the political integration of Africans and would not diminish white economic and political supremacy if it was accompanied by improved state control.¹⁸⁴ The Sauer Report sought to reconcile these contradictory policies by presenting “practical apartheid” as necessary in the near term for economic stabilization following WWII and “total apartheid” as the ultimate long term goal.¹⁸⁵ In order to satisfy the “total apartheid” faction the Sauer report recommended a freeze on further African urbanization by treating African men, recruited from the reserves, as “temporary sojourners” whose wives and families would not be permitted to reside with them in urban areas.¹⁸⁶

The ANC Youth League (ANCYL) was established in 1944 around a core of committed activists who included Anton Lembede, Ashby Peter Mda, Jordan Ngubane, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and Walter Sisulu.¹⁸⁷ Like many Africans they viewed the Natives Representation Act of 1936 as a betrayal by white liberals. This betrayal lent

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Posel, 52.

¹⁸⁴ Posel, 55. The arguments of the SAAU were influenced, Posel contends, by their concerns that the policy of total apartheid was based on development and enlargement of African reserves which would create competition in agricultural markets and possibly reduce white control of water resources which lay on the borders of the reserves. (56).

¹⁸⁵ Posel, 58-59.

¹⁸⁶ Posel, 60.

¹⁸⁷ Gerhart, *Black Power*, 50-51.

credibility to the attitude held by the younger members of the ANC toward white, liberal ideology which espoused gradual assimilation of Africans as citizens in the white state. The ANCYL espoused an African Nationalism which rejected white leadership as articulated in their 1948 manifesto:

The majority of Europeans share the spoils of the exploitative caste society of South Africa. A few of them love justice and condemn racial oppression, but their voice is negligible, and in the last analysis count for, nothing. In their struggle for freedom the Africans will be wasting their time and deflecting their forces if they look up to the Europeans either for inspiration or for help in their political struggle.”¹⁸⁸

Indeed, after 1936, the influence of white liberals in Parliament was negligible; led by well intentioned but ultimately ineffective white Natives’ Representatives. Margaret Ballinger, who became a member of the Black Sash, Donald Molteno, a trusted advisor to the Black Sash during the 1950’s, and Gordon Hemming were elected as “Natives Representatives” in the House of Assembly in 1937 and were seated in 1938.¹⁸⁹ Reflecting the increasing militancy of motherism among African women and African dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of white Native’s Representatives, Mrs. Anthony, Chairman of the Cape Town Food Committee, asserted in 1948:

The vote is a weapon we must have so that we can safeguard the future of our children... We have to worry about managing our husband’s pay envelopes...getting enough bread for our children and seeing that they go

¹⁸⁸ Document 57 “Basic Policy of Congress Youth League,” Manifesto Issued by the National Executive Committee of the ANC Youth League, 1948, Karis and Gwendolyn Carter, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), 329.

¹⁸⁹ Phyllis Lewson, “Liberals in Politics and Administration, 1936-1948,” in *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa*, 101; Robb, *The Sash and I*, 39; see also The Black Sash, Circular no. 50, (26 February 1960), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: Mf 2552 reel 2. Circular no. 50 announced Margaret Ballinger’s motion in the House of Assembly regarding pass laws referencing the Black Sash Cape Western Region Advice Office findings that the pass laws “disrupt African family life.”

to school. We want to put people in Parliament who understand our problems and will fight in our interests.¹⁹⁰

In the 1948 election neither the NP nor the UP won an absolute majority of seats. However, the NP was able to form a coalition government by combining its 70 seats with the 9 seats won by the Afrikaner Party.¹⁹¹ Posel argues that between 1948 and 1953, “the logic of electoral politics prevented anything but a cautious, short term approach to apartheid.”¹⁹² Internally, the NP was not yet committed to “total apartheid” and the approach of the SAAU was consistent in many ways with the UP policy as articulated by the Fagan Commission. But the NP’s ascension to power enabled the architects of apartheid to move toward “total apartheid” as governmental policy through influx control legislation which was intended to limit and reduce the population of African women and children in urban areas. The Black Sash vehemently opposed legislation that prohibited African women from living with their husbands in urban areas. Like African women, they viewed this prohibition as legislating the destruction of African families.

While there are many facets to apartheid and it is impossible to thoroughly examine them here, Posel offers a persuasive characterization of apartheid as “...the product of a range of struggles with uneven effects... [with] influx control and [white

¹⁹⁰ *Guardian*, 20 January 1948, quoted in Walker, *Women and Resistance*, 82. The Food Committee later formed the Non-European Women’s League to fight for the rights of black women. However, Walker notes, the league viewed the food issue and the franchise as “inseparable.” (Ibid).

¹⁹¹ This coalition held a 9 seat advantage over the combined seats of the United and Labour Parties who won 65 seats and 6 seats respectively. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, 73 n 60.

¹⁹² Posel, 73.

supremacy] as its central pillars.”¹⁹³ The emergence of apartheid radicalized proponents of African nationalism to take a more confrontational stance toward a white minority state that would not offer even the smallest liberal reforms. In attempting to tighten existing structures of labour manipulation and influx control, apartheid required a massive, albeit contested, exercise in social engineering which exponentially expanded the power of the state. In 1949, following the NP’s ascension to power, the Youth League ascended to the leadership of the ANC deposing the moderate (some would say overly cautious) Dr. Xuma, replacing him with James Moroka.¹⁹⁴ The Youth League “Programme of Action” launched in 1949, was intended to directly challenge policies of apartheid. The Programme of Action included boycotts, strikes, stay-at-homes, and other forms of non-violent civil disobedience.¹⁹⁵ The government responded to increased black activism by passing the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950. The Suppression of

¹⁹³ Posel, 256. Hermann Giliomee has suggested that the policies of apartheid were intended to institutionalize the ideological components of Afrikaner Nationalism: “group-belongingness, group mobilization and group position.” Hermann Giliomee, “The Growth of Afrikaner Identity,” in Beinart and Dubow, *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*, 190. He observes that during the period between 1948-1959, “...the central theme in the Afrikaner’s self-concept was the paradox of an insecure white people in need of legislation to secure its survival.” (200). Viewed from the perspective of Marxist-Materialist structuralism, apartheid, “...including separate development, can best be understood as the mechanism, specific to South Africa...of maintaining a high rate of capitalist exploitation through a system which guarantees a cheap and controlled labour force, under circumstances in which the conditions of reproduction (in the redistributive African economy in the reserves) of that labour force are rapidly deteriorating.” Harold Wolpe, in “Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid,” in Beinart and Dubow, *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*, 67-68. See also, Martin Legassick, “Legislation, Ideology and Economy in post 1948 South Africa.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1, no. 1 (1974), 9. Liberal historians, on the other hand, tend to focus on the ascendancy of Afrikaner Nationalist ideology and the failure of the Cape Liberal tradition. They argue that apartheid was not particularly beneficial to capitalist interests, particularly in the commercial and manufacturing sectors. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, 14. While all of these examinations offer glimpses of apartheid, it is also true to say as Beinart and Dubow suggest, “apartheid purported to be a rigorous and totalizing ideology in a way that segregation had never been.” Beinart and Dubow, “The Historiography of Segregation and Apartheid,” in Beinart and Dubow, *The Making of Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*, 12.

¹⁹⁴ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 132.

¹⁹⁵ Specific activities associated with the Programme of Action a “Defend Free Speech” march in Johannesburg on 26 March, 1950; A May Day strike around the country which was met by violent suppression from the police; and the Day of Protest on 26 June 1950. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, 33-34.

Communism Act targeted any group or doctrine which proposed to effect “political, industrial social or economic change” through promoting “disturbance or disorder,” by “unlawful acts or encouragement of feelings of hostility between the European and non-European races...”¹⁹⁶ The Suppression of Communism Act caused major concern among the leaders of the Black Sash as they contemplated assisting African women with bail for pass law arrests in 1957 and 1958. They feared that providing bail might be characterized as “incitement” under the Act.¹⁹⁷ They also feared that the Cape Western Region’s refusal to obey the “Church Clause” of the 1957 NLAA which prohibited inter-racial meetings might occasion the arrest of Black Sash leadership.¹⁹⁸

The Group Areas Act of 1950 and the Abolition of Passes and Documents Act introduced in 1952 which extended pass laws to African women, were critical components of influx control and a racialized patriarchal vision of white supremacy under apartheid.¹⁹⁹ The elimination of all remaining black freehold areas around the country was one of the purposes of the Group Areas Act which demarcated the specified areas where each race could live.²⁰⁰ The government imagined that Africans could be forced to comply with pass laws if residents were summarily “removed” from freehold areas to Bantustans in rural areas or to townships controlled by municipalities or the state.

¹⁹⁶ Lodge, 33.

¹⁹⁷ The Black Sash, Minutes of National Council Meeting, June 1958. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4.

¹⁹⁸ The Black Sash, Minutes of the 10th Meeting of the Central Executive, 26 July 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

¹⁹⁹ Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, 103.

²⁰⁰ These freehold areas were the only areas in which Africans retained some measure of home ownership. The leaseholds had been purchased prior to the 1923 Native Urban Areas Act or remained from mission stations. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, 90-91.

As became evident by 1956, the government also hoped to disrupt black political resistance.²⁰¹

The capstone of influx control policy was enacted in 1952 by the Native Laws Amendment Act section 10(1) which delineated African rights to remain in urban areas for longer than 72 hours.²⁰² Men who were born and permanently resided in an urban area or who worked continuously in the urban area for one employer for 10 years were entitled to permanent residency under section 10(1)(a). Men who worked for more than one employer over a period of 15 years were entitled to residency under section 10(1)(b).²⁰³ Demonstrating the racialized patriarchy of the white state once again, section 10(1)(c) provided that African women could only reside in urban areas longer than 72 hours if they were married to a man who qualified under section 10(1)(a) or (b) and normally resided with him.²⁰⁴ Women could not obtain a pass unless they registered with a labour bureau and were qualified to reside in the Cape under section 10(1)(c). As women became subject to passes, they also became subject to arrest for failing to have the pass on their person; for technical pass violations or irregularities, or for no reason at all. Women who had lived in urban areas all of their lives were subject to removal if their husband passed away or if they left the urban area to visit family in rural areas.²⁰⁵

Extending passes to African women facilitated implementation of the NAD's Urban Labour Preference Policy (ULPP) by which the population of Africans in urban

²⁰¹ Lodge, 97-99.

²⁰² Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, 102-103.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ This provision was codified in Section 10 (1) (c). Similarly the rights of unmarried children under 16 to remain in urban areas depended on whether or not their father met the same requirements. Posel, 103.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. See also Wells, *We Now Demand!* 104.

areas was to be kept to the minimum necessary to satisfy the needs of white businesses and farms for unskilled African labour.²⁰⁶ The ULPP was adapted as well to the specific regional particularities of the Cape Province. In 1954, W.M. Eiselen announced that under the NAD's influx control policy, the Cape was designated as the natural home of the "Coloured people" and henceforth they would be protected from labour competition by the "natives."²⁰⁷ Therefore, under the Coloured Labour Preference Policy (CLPP), Africans would not be admitted to the Western Cape unless and until Coloured labour could no longer meet the needs of white employers.²⁰⁸ Posel notes that one unspoken reason for the CLPP was "the prospect of growing numbers of African and Coloureds working together excited fears of a united black working class with formidable economic bargaining powers."²⁰⁹ Government fears of a united resistance movement between the African and classified Coloured populations no doubt played a significant role as well.

The ANC launched the Defiance Campaign in 1952 in conjunction with the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) to demonstrate black opposition to apartheid by defying selected targets of social segregation. African women played significant roles in the Defiance Campaign. Their participation was motivated in part by the Abolition of Passes and Documents Act introduced in 1952 which extended pass laws to African women.²¹⁰ Former white members of the banned South African Communist Party combined with left-leaning liberal whites to form the white South African Congress of Democrats (COD)

²⁰⁶ Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, 84.

²⁰⁷ Posel, 85.

²⁰⁸ Posel, 87. The CLPP was enforced in the Cape south of the Orange River, and west of the magisterial districts of De Aar, Uniondal and Knysna. Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 3.

²⁰⁹ Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, 88.

²¹⁰ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 131-132.

in 1953 and affiliated the COD with the ANC and the SAIC in the Congress Alliance.²¹¹ Although the Defiance Campaign was conducted as a campaign of passive, non-violent resistance modeled after Ghandian principles of civil disobedience, this demonstration of African activism was deeply disturbing to many Europeans.²¹² As we shall see, the Black Sash resisted civil disobedience as a strategy until 1957 when, reluctantly, the leaders approved civil disobedience by the Cape Western Region in response to the 1957 Native Laws Amendment Act with the proviso that it be a strategy of last resort.²¹³

In 1953 white liberals broke away from the United Party and formed the Liberal Party as an inter-racial political party. Although most of the women who joined the Black Sash in 1955 were members of the United Party, many women had close ties with members of the liberal party. Margaret Ballinger was a member of the Black Sash; Alan Payton, whose wife was a member of the Black Sash, wrote the first Black Sash dedication; and Donald Molteno counseled the leadership during much of its first year.²¹⁴ Eulalie Stott, a founder member and powerful leader of the Black Sash Cape Western

²¹¹ Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, 69.

²¹² Gerhart, *Black Power*, 105; Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 132. In 1952, Chief Albert Luthuli, a committed Christian and liberal was elected President of the ANC. His rhetoric was framed in terms of African participation in government rather than African control of government. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, 68.

²¹³ The Black Sash, Minutes of the National Conference of the Black Sash at Pietermaritzburg (22-24 May 1957), Resolution 8b, 41-45. Black Sash Society Papers.

²¹⁴ Noel Robb, *The Sash and I* (Cape Town: Claremont Press, 2006), 39.

Region was also a member of the Liberal Party.²¹⁵ Attitudes among white liberals were divided along a continuum of ideology ranging from those who supported some degree of segregation to those who supported a non-racial franchise and majority rule. The latter group was itself split over the extent to which liberal whites should associate with the COD because they feared the influence of Communists. Liberals also disagreed over the pace by which a non-racial franchise should be extended.²¹⁶ These same issues confronted the Black Sash during its early years. Many women in the Black Sash including Ruth Foley, a founder and the National President from 1955-1957, objected to cooperation in any coalition which included the COD. Since the ANC insisted that the COD be included in their campaigns, the primary concern among the early Black Sash leadership over collaboration and cooperation with the ANC and the ANCWL was related to association with the COD who they assumed to be a Communist front organization.²¹⁷ Both the NP and the UP discouraged white women from joining the Black Sash claiming that the Black Sash supported majority rule.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Eulalie Stott, interview by Ruendree Govinder in Cape Town 23 May 2005. South Africa: Overcoming Apartheid Building Democracy, online, <http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/video.php?id=31> Michigan State University African Studies Center and MATRIX (accessed 10 February 2010); see also Vigne, *Liberals against Apartheid*, 38.

²¹⁶ Randolph Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, 17-18. Upon learning of the formation of the Liberal Party, Sir De Villiers Graaf, soon to be elected leader of the United Party, responded, "By all means, form a Liberal Party because then the UP will no longer be accused of liberalism." Quoted in Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, 19.

²¹⁷ The Black Sash, "Minutes of National Council Meeting 9-12 June 1959," 17-23, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2. Mrs. Foley resigned from the Black Sash in 1959 rather than participate with the COD on the Bishop's Committee. Ruth Foley to Jean Sinclair, 5 May 1959. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4; The Black Sash, "Secretary's Notes of National Council Meeting in Johannesburg June 1959," 24-29. Black Sash Society Papers.

²¹⁸ The Black Sash, Minutes of National Council Meeting, November, 1956. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4.

“The Twilight of Parliamentary Democracy” White Women Voters’ Concerns Over Creeping Dictatorship in 1955

In 1955, most English-speaking white voters belonged to the United Party and a majority of English-speakers supported segregation.²¹⁹ Most whites, regardless of party affiliation, also supported early apartheid legislation. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act in 1949, and the Population Registration Act, Immorality Act, and Suppression of Communism Act in 1950 passed with support of both NP and UP members of parliament.²²⁰ The Senate Act which provided the NP with a two-thirds majority in the Senate through government appointment rather than election by the voters, aroused fears among white voters that the NP was willing to oppress even the white population if this was necessary to accomplish the goals of apartheid. The fear of creeping dictatorship as a result of the Senate Act coupled with the rescission of the constitutionally protected voting rights of qualified, classified Coloured voters convinced the women of the Defense of the Constitution League that “they must act” to bring the white male government “to its senses.”²²¹ Unlike the white suffragists of the previous generation they were unwilling to bow to the racialized patriarchy of the state. Following the Governor-General’s rejection of the League’s petition to veto the Senate Act, the League planned to deliver a petition to Mr. Strijdom calling for his resignation. But on 22 June, Mr. Strijdom announced that he refused to meet with them. Mrs. Foley implied that his refusal was due to a lack of courage on his part retorting, “We feel it is one of Mr. Strijdom’s duties as Prime Minister to face the deputation himself....We represent a very

²¹⁹ William Beinart and Saul Dubow, “The Historiography of Segregation and Apartheid,” in Beinart and Dubow, *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, 1.

²²⁰ Clark and Worger, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 44-46.

²²¹ Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, “Manifesto,” Black Sash Society Papers.

large and articulate group of opinion in South Africa, which is convinced that the Senate Act is a disaster, and has destroyed the basic trust in the stability of the Constitution. We shall present the Petition to whatever deputy the Prime Minister chooses to appoint,” she added acerbically.²²² And so a procession of over one thousand undaunted white women marched on 28 June from Zoo Lake in Pretoria to the amphitheatre where they sang the National Anthem, *Die Stem van Suid-Afrika* (The Call of South Africa), in both English and Afrikaans.²²³ They read a public prayer and observed a minute of silence. Then a delegation of women led by Mrs. Foley strode to the Prime Minister’s office where they were received by Mr. Strijdom’s deputy, Mr. Ben Schoeman. He informed them that while he was ready to consider their submissions, the government had no intention of altering the Senate Act. He said that he was “fully in accord with the desire of the women signing this petition, to secure a peaceful future for the children growing up in South Africa.” He added that this was precisely the reason that the Coloured voter had to be removed from the common roll. Otherwise, “...in five or ten years time [the Coloured] would obtain the mastery of the Cape and the future of South Africans would be in danger.”²²⁴ When Mrs. Foley informed Mr. Schoeman that the protest was not at an end and would continue for another forty-eight hours, he replied with a patronizing smile,

²²² Quoted in Rogers, *The Black Sash* 33.

²²³ Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, “The Voice of the Women,” (29 June 1955), Black Sash Archival Collection, Noel Robb Papers: BC 1092.f, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department. On 25-26 June 1955, three days before the Pretoria protest of the League, 3,000 delegates met in Kliptown in a multi-racial Congress of the People. They adopted the Freedom Charter which called for a universal non-racial franchise and proclaimed: “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people. The Freedom Charter, ANC Historical Documents, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/charter.html> (accessed January 15, 2010).

²²⁴ “The Voice of the Women.” Noel Robb Papers.

“Take all the time you need.”²²⁵ Taking him at his word, four women stood vigil in front of the Union buildings in one hour shifts for the next forty-eight hours. They stood in what participants agreed was a bitter cold with their heads bowed; on top of their coats they draped a black sash which extended from their right shoulder to their left hip.²²⁶ Those not standing vigil camped outside.

During the first night the women pieced together a newsletter called *Voice of the Women* in which they answered the questions, “Why are you marching? Why are you here?”²²⁷ The newsletter was printed and distributed during the night to various newspapers. The next morning, news of the women’s protest was carried on the front page of the *Rand Daily Mail* which also reprinted the newsletter.²²⁸ Reflecting the attitude of many women in the League, Miss Mary McLarty who had had campaigned for women’s suffrage in the 1920’s and was a UP Member of Parliament, saw the Senate Act as a moral issue involving racial justice which demanded action by women. She wrote:

We know that for more than 100 years, there have been Coloured voters on the roll. I am an old woman now, and have lived in the Cape for many years. I was there long before this bogey was raised. I cannot see the threat to white civilization; on the contrary, I am convinced that I have seen civilization spread because it has been shared. Once or twice in a lifetime circumstances demand dramatic action. This spontaneous response by the women of South Africa to a crisis in the life of the nation is such an occasion. I am glad and proud to have been given the opportunity of sharing in it.²²⁹

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ The women’s decision to have only four women at a time stand vigil was intended to signify the four provinces which signed the Act of Union. “The Voice of the Women,” Noel Robb Papers.

²²⁷ “The Voice of the Women,” Noel Robb Papers.

²²⁸ The women described their camp as a “Laager” harkening back to the defensive formation of *Voortrekker* wagons during the Great Trek. Ibid.

²²⁹ “The Voice of the Women,” Noel Robb Papers.

Another marcher connected her faith in God with her moral stance opposing the Senate Act as she wrote of being told that she would no longer be welcomed in her church. She wrote, "My love for them is great, but would die without my own self-respect. If I lost that through them, I should learn to hate, not love. If my church is one which dares for such a reason to cast out one of its children, I am better without a church, secure in my conscience and my God."²³⁰

At a rally on the steps of the Johannesburg City Hall following their return from Pretoria, Mrs. Foley framed the women's protest in terms of moral courage as she told the crowd, "The Minister tried to sidetrack us with familiar political arguments. He was at an advantage because we are not politicians, but I realized that the basic difference between him and us was that he made a fetish of fear...we are not afraid...we now call on our husbands, brothers, fathers and sons to help us in the struggle."²³¹ The League would soon learn that their concept of political morality envisioned a more inclusive political agenda than that envisioned by their husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons. They would also learn that white men of all political persuasions envisioned a limited role for white women in the public political arena and expected white women to collaborate in maintaining the system of white supremacy.

²³⁰ "The Voice of the Women," Noel Robb Papers.

²³¹ Quoted in Rogers, 40.

3. “We Shall Protest on Moral Grounds”: Defiant White Motherism and the Contradictions of Liberalism in the Black Sash, 1955-1956

From the start, the Black Sash embraced universal principles generally associated with liberalism: equality before the law, representation in government regardless of race, and freedom of speech, assembly, and religion. Historically, however, liberalism in South Africa did not embrace democracy based on a non-racial universal franchise.²³² Butler, Elphick and Welsh argue that liberals in South Africa shied away from full democracy “out of fear that the majority would subvert liberal values ...they defined themselves as reasonable people occupying the middle ground between implacable extremes.”²³³ Liberal occupation of the middle ground between Afrikaner Nationalism and African Nationalism resulted in part, they contend, from “the Christian emphasis on peacemaking and reconciliation...and in part from the comfortable middle-class status of most liberals, blacks included.”²³⁴ Both of these observations are applicable to the members of the Black Sash during the early years. In 1955, as we shall see, the membership certainly held diverse opinions about who should be included in the franchise. Some of the members were convinced that majority rule through a universal franchise was

²³² Jeffrey Butler, Richard Elphick and David Welsh, “editors’ introduction,” in Butler, Elphick, and Welsh, *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect*, 7.

²³³ Ibid. One might question the conclusion that liberals feared that the majority would “subvert liberal values” as from its inception, the ANC embraced liberal principles of equality before the law and representative democracy. It is much more likely that white liberals were concerned that majority rule would interfere with the privilege enjoyed by whites and upon which their “comfortable middle class status” depended.

²³⁴ Butler, Elphick and Welsh, “editors’ introduction,” 7.

inevitable.²³⁵ Some members were wary of extending the franchise to blacks and favored some form of enlightened paternalism in the short term.²³⁶ A minority of members favored a gradual extension of the franchise.²³⁷ It is likely that most members of the League in 1955 would have accepted a return to a qualified non-racial franchise in the Cape Province and gradual extension of the Cape franchise to the Northern Provinces.²³⁸ Even though women in the Black Sash held diverse opinions about the franchise, they were united in the belief that as mothers, they had both a right and an obligation to proclaim a moral message condemning unjust laws in the public political debate of the nation. Their condemnation of the early policies of apartheid as unjust deviated from previous traditions of women's political activity because they insisted on independence from other political groups and opposed racialized patriarchal policies intended to maintain white supremacy. Unlike their forebears in the women's suffrage movement they refused to allow men to dictate the direction of their political activity.

As Mrs. Foley suggested in her remarks in Johannesburg when the League returned from their confrontation with the NP Government in Pretoria in June 1955, the

²³⁵ Women's Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein, (26-28 April, 1956), 13-15. Black Sash Society Papers.

²³⁶ Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein, (26-28 April, 1956), 15, Black Sash Society Papers.

²³⁷ This appears to be the position favored by Mrs. Foley, a founder member and the President of the League in 1955. She was against laws that were unjust but did not favor extending the franchise. During the debate over the meaning of political morality at the Bloemfontein National Conference in 1956, she exclaimed, "Mrs. Cluver is surely not seriously advocating any sort of franchise for the non-European!" Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein, (26-28 April, 1956), 14, Black Sash Society Papers.

²³⁸ As will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, a controversy erupted among branches of the Black Sash in 1957 over the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a basis for the notion of political morality. One of the objections to the UDHR by more conservative regions of the Sash was that it promoted a universal non-racial franchise. As an alternative, the Lowveld and Natal-Midlands Regions proposed advocating a system through which a qualified non-racial franchise might be gradually extended. The Black Sash, Circular 31, Annexure C (20 March 1957), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 5.

League did not intend to disband even though the Senate Act appeared to be headed for passage. The questions they now confronted were how and in what form they would continue their protest. After considering the effect of the Pretoria protest and the positive media coverage, the Johannesburg Special Committee made two important decisions on policy in July, 1955. First, they agreed that the League would jealously guard its independence by eschewing affiliation with any political party or other political movement. Second, they decided that the ministers should be reminded constantly of the women's moral condemnation of the government's "unconstitutional measures" by two methods: they would continue daily vigils of four women at the Union buildings in Pretoria until the Senate Act became law; and they would confront the ministers wherever they went in the course of their official duties.²³⁹ Women who stood vigil in Pretoria and participated in the "haunts" of the ministers, as these confrontations came to be called, wore their black sashes—a sign of mourning over the Constitution.²⁴⁰

The League's tradition of non-affiliation appears to have had several purposes. First, the League's insistence on its separate identity as a non-aligned political pressure group of women, the leaders believed, enabled the League to maintain an independent women's moral voice in the public political arena. Second, the non-affiliation provision enabled the League to refuse to participate in campaigns with groups with whom they did

²³⁹ Women's Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of Johannesburg Committee, 12 June, 1955, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

²⁴⁰ One of the first ministers to be targeted was Mr. Louw who was met on 18 June as he returned from Cape Town by 27 silent women wearing the Sash. In response to their grim stares as he walked a gauntlet between them, he scoffed, "What is this, the Housewives League?" Rogers, *The Black Sash* 43. However, during the following year, Black Sash haunts became legendary and English-speaking newspapers carried accounts of Mr. Verwoerd, Minister of Bantu Affairs, and Mr. Swart, Minister of Justice, using entrances reserved for "non-Europeans" to avoid walking the gauntlet of white women wearing black sashes. (51-53).

not agree. Finally, during the early years, the non-affiliation provision enabled the League to maintain distance from other women's organizations without drawing attention to the issue of race.²⁴¹ Ironically, the non-affiliation provision clashed first with the Covenanters, a group Ruth Foley and Jean Sinclair may have helped to form.²⁴² In July 1955, following Mrs. Foley's call for men to join in the League's struggle against the Senate Act, a group of liberals calling themselves the Covenant League (Covenanters), met to explore the idea of a national convention and drew up a "covenant" for a new constitution for South Africa.²⁴³ Although Mrs. Foley and Mrs. Sinclair attended the inaugural meeting of the Covenanters, Mrs. Sinclair voiced her concern in a subsequent meeting of the League about the Covenant's lack of clarity over who would be represented at any new constitutional convention. She told the Johannesburg Special Committee, "Non-Europeans must be represented at the national convention and if we did not say so now there was danger of our being repudiated later."²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ The Black Sash would abandon its refusal to participate in anti-apartheid campaigns alongside groups with whom it did not agree as early as 1957 when the Cape Western Region participated in C.A.T.P.A.W. It would abandon racial exclusivity in membership in 1963.

²⁴² Rogers states that Mrs. Foley and Mrs. Sinclair attended the first meeting of the Covenant committee and she and Mrs. Sinclair convened a public meeting under the auspices of the Black Sash to discuss the need for a new constitutional convention. Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 49-51. Michelman suggests that the Covenant committee was created by the League. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 47.

²⁴³ This call for a constitutional convention by white liberals was partially motivated by the popular success of the Congress of the People which adopted the "Freedom Charter," held in Kliptown on 26, June 1955, just two days before the League marched on Pretoria. Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-68*, 44-47. Members of the Liberal Party were themselves divided over the party's franchise policy. The more conservative members supported a non-racial qualified franchise while younger liberals embraced universal suffrage. Alan Paton wrote to Margaret Ballinger in 1953 stating, "Whatever certain non-whites say about the universal franchise, it will never be willingly granted by white people." Paton said that he could not support "...opening the doors of our society to tribal Africans, Indian labourers and the large depressed portion of Cape Coloureds." Alan Paton to Margaret Ballinger, 18 June, 1953 quoted in Vigne, 29.

²⁴⁴ Women's Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of Committee Meeting, 20 July 1955, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF2552 reel 1.

In August John Lang, a member of the Liberal Party and the Covenanters, met with the Johannesburg Special Committee of the League to discuss “the need for closer union with the Covenant.”²⁴⁵ The ensuing debate reflects the divisiveness of the franchise issue and the subordinate role Mr. Lang envisioned for women in political activity. The debate also reveals the women’s determination to maintain an independent moral voice in the public political debate and their belief that the men’s leadership had been ineffective. Mr. Lang’s opening statement was particularly patronizing. He told the committee “It is no use for women to go on alone in the struggle as you do not know where you are going and your efforts will lead to nothing.”²⁴⁶ One member replied that the League could not back the idea of a National Convention, “...until there had been some clarity about the way it would be called.”²⁴⁷ Mr. Lang did not agree. He contended that the group should organize now to have 250,000 people take “a strong stand.”²⁴⁸ Another member of the Special Committee, Mrs. Davidoff, told Lang, “it is essential to build up the women’s league into a strong body and to create powerful public opinion.”²⁴⁹ At this point, Mr. Lang was losing his patience and retorted, “It is a waste to organize the women’s organization and then, if it is decided to combine, to have to re-organize to incorporate the men.”²⁵⁰ This angered Mrs. Swan and Mrs. Hill. Mrs. Swan asked Lang, “Is the aim to call a National Convention to restore the status quo—or on moral grounds to have something better? Is it to defend the Constitution or to reconstruct

²⁴⁵Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of Special Committee Meeting, 27 August, 1955, 1, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

²⁴⁶ Minutes of Special Committee Meeting, 27 August, 1955, 1, Black Sash Society Papers.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Minutes of Special Committee Meeting, 27 August, 1955, 1-2, Black Sash Society Papers.

a better one? It must be an organization of men and women working together.” Mrs. Hill wanted to know, “In what way can we work together?”²⁵¹ An exasperated Mr. Lang responded, “We have gone past the point where we can join forces. We should have done so immediately when you returned from the march in Pretoria. People are now in no mood to resist.”²⁵² Mrs. Foley appeared to support the idea of a joint campaign with the Covenanters. She argued, “We should shift the emphasis to the policy of calling for a national convention.” But Mrs. Kerr responded, “This brings us back to the questions which could not be answered: How is the National Convention to be called?”²⁵³ Mrs. Lyall-Watson summed up the sentiments of many on the committee regarding the effectiveness of men’s political activism when she told Mr. Lang, “We have decided that we cannot give up the League, as there is such a demand from the country for a lead of some kind.”²⁵⁴ Mr. Lang could not resist a parting shot even as he gave up the battle, “It would be a mistake to stop the movement now,” he said, “you women should call meetings with your husbands to help call for a National Convention. A big campaign to collect signatures will be launched soon.”²⁵⁵ Ultimately, the women decided that the question should come up again for discussion at a later stage and the meeting adjourned.²⁵⁶

The Covenant was a divisive issue for League branches around South Africa. The Cape Town branch of the League, second only to the Johannesburg branch in size and

²⁵¹ Minutes of Special Committee Meeting, 27 August, 1955, 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

activity, asked for a national conference of the League to “have a full discussion on policy.”²⁵⁷ Meeting on 11 and 12 September, the conference agreed on general principles of policy, including non-affiliation. Mrs. Foley announced the policies adopted by the Johannesburg Special Committee, “The League is non-party political; the League has no intention of merging with any other organization or body; in order to carry out its aims, the League has adopted a policy of demonstrations including vigils and meeting of the cabinet ministers whenever and wherever possible by members wearing a Black Sash.”²⁵⁸ The conference also agreed to stage national demonstrations when the Senate was dissolved and when the new Senate was seated.²⁵⁹

Mrs. Foley, who still hoped to cooperate with the Covenanters, told the group that she considered the Covenant’s demand for a national convention as a suitable long-term aim for the league. But Mrs. MacRoberts of Pretoria questioned the viability of the demand for a national convention as petitions had been sent out to 7,000 people and only 20 people had offered to help collect signatures. Whereupon Mrs. Van Selm of Cape Town announced that the Cape Western Region could not support the Covenant.²⁶⁰ As a result of these disagreements, the group passed a resolution of non-affiliation

²⁵⁷ Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of a Conference on 11-12 September, 1955, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1. Thirty-three leaders from the Johannesburg, Cape Western, Durban, Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Middleburg branches attended the conference. A number of branches including those in Port Elizabeth and East London were unable to attend due to short notice. The concerns about policy which prompted the Cape Town Branch request were related to the Covenant movement and to questions about general objectives and aims. (2).

²⁵⁸ Minutes of a Conference on 11-12 September, 1955, 1. The conference also identified rules for “The Wearing of the Black Sash.” Local branches had considerable latitude about conditions for “Black Sashing” or “Sashing” a Cabinet Minister. Only women who were actually citizens of South Africa could engage in “Black Sashing.” Members were not to engage in Black Sashing of ministers if the Governor General were present, when the host is a foreign diplomat, if the function is a religious gathering. (2).

²⁵⁹ Minutes of a Conference on 11-12 September, 1955, 5, Black Sash Society Papers.

²⁶⁰ Minutes of a Conference on 11-12 September, 1955, 5-6, Black Sash Society Papers.

proclaiming, “The League does not support nor associate itself with any other movement unless there is agreement of three-quarters of the delegates at a conference elected according to membership.”²⁶¹ Debate continued over the parameters of the non-affiliation resolution when the League held a larger conference in Port Elizabeth in November, 1955. In a compromise, the conference agreed that a majority vote of the National Executive of the League should decide whether or not to cooperate with a particular group. The League also agreed that members could take part as individuals in demonstrations sponsored by other groups, but could not wear the Black Sash unless the League was officially cooperating with the demonstration organizer.²⁶² The non-affiliation resolution with various modifications was incorporated into successive Black Sash constitutions and was used to maintain independence from all other groups for the next four decades.²⁶³

The League’s strategy of conducting vigils and “attending” government ministers became a source of positive press publicity and occasioned controversy over women’s participation in national debates. From July through November, 1955, the League maintained a continuous daytime vigil of four women in front of the Union Buildings in Pretoria. In January, 1956 the vigil moved to the Parliament buildings in Cape Town in

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of a Conference held at Port Elizabeth on 29-30 November, 1955, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF2552 reel 1.

²⁶³ The non-affiliation provision also caused controversy within the Black Sash and misunderstandings between the Black Sash and groups with whom they were sympathetic, particularly the ANCWL and later, the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW). In 1987 the Black Sash engaged in a contentious debate over whether to affiliate with FEDSAW which had been re-started in 1984. Noel Robb was among those who argued that the Black Sash should not affiliate with any other group because she thought it would limit their ability to remain a moral, independent voice. She insisted that the principle of non-affiliation had served the Sash well over the years even though it was “hellish uncomfortable” to maintain. The Black Sash, “The Great Affiliation Debate,” Black Sash Archival Collection, Cape Western Region Papers: BC 668.L.39, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department.

anticipation of the opening of the reconfigured Parliament and the debate over the Separate Representation of Voters Act which would remove qualified classified Coloured voters from the common roll.²⁶⁴ The women also “haunted” National Party ministers when they attended party meetings to select new Senators. Whereas on vigils the women stood with heads bowed, on haunts, they stood in two lines and stared directly at the ministers.²⁶⁵ The League’s confrontations with the National Party over the Senate Act and the Separate Representation of Voters Act reflect the League’s commitment to liberal principles of equality before the law, some form of representative democracy, and freedom of speech and assembly. However, these confrontations also demonstrated the women’s refusal to adopt prevailing patriarchal attitudes which imagined a woman’s voice as confined to the domestic space of the home. The League embraced a political dimension to the identity of motherhood which insisted upon an independent moral voice in the public political debates of the nation. Motherisms—political activity by women, informed by their identity as mothers—were not without precedent in South African history and arose during times of crisis when women perceived their ability to protect and

²⁶⁴ Minutes of a Conference held at Port Elizabeth on 29-30 November 1955, 4, Black Sash Society Papers.

²⁶⁵ The League maintained strict rules of conduct for the vigils and haunts. Minutes of a Conference on 11-12 September, 1955, 2, Black Sash Society Papers. The women were required to dress in their “Sunday best”; vigils and haunts were conducted in silence; heads were bowed during vigils but during haunts women stared directly at the ministers; women standing vigil and women on haunts were not to respond to any provocation. Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, “Regulations for Black Sash Wearers,” (23 November 1955), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF2552 reel 1. These rules demonstrate the women’s understanding that their moral voice was related to their appearance of respectability. Their bowed heads during vigils evoked an attitude of prayer over the “immorality” of the government’s actions. Their silent stares during haunts evoked images of a mother’s unspoken reproach to a wayward child. These confrontations between women and Afrikaner ministers challenged the allegedly Christian components of Afrikaner Nationalism and the minister’s masculinity.

care for their children to be threatened. Motherisms were also sites of contest between competing interests of gender, race and class.²⁶⁶

Beacons of Morality and Mothers of the Nation: White Motherisms in South African History

A long tradition existed among the English-speaking white population in South Africa which combined evangelical Christian beliefs with domesticity to imagine white motherhood as especially virtuous. This tradition harkens back to the abolitionist campaign in England.²⁶⁷ Middle and upper-middle class British women imagined motherhood as especially virtuous, "...serving as a beacon of morality to their husbands, women would influence society from their place in the home."²⁶⁸ Slavery, the abolitionists argued, was the cause of moral degeneration among both slave owners and those enslaved. Thus British women had a moral responsibility and a moral authority to speak out against slavery.²⁶⁹ During the South African war of 1899-1902, English-speaking white South African women, loyal to the British cause, combined the moral authority of motherhood and domesticity with politics through the Guild of Loyal

²⁶⁶ See, Julia Wells, "Maternal Politics in Organizing Black South African Women: The Historical Lessons," in *Sisterhood Feminism's and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1998), 252-253.

²⁶⁷ Pamela Scully, *Liberating the Family? Gender and British Slave Emancipation in the Rural Western Cape, South Africa, 1823-1853* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1997), 34. See also, Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1991). Although Scully presents motherhood as a social identity often imposed on women by men, women are not without agency and use the moral authority of motherhood for their own ends. Temma Kaplan, *Crazy for Democracy: Women in Grassroots Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 6-8.

²⁶⁸ Scully, 36.

²⁶⁹ Scully, 37.

Women.²⁷⁰ Although Guild members described themselves as “non-political,” they argued that they brought special “womanly gifts to reinforcing the bonds of empire and healing the wounds of war.”²⁷¹ During their struggle for suffrage, English-speaking women adapted previous constructs of the moral power of motherhood but these were contested by white men. The suffragists claimed that women’s role as “homebuilder” gave them particular insights and contributions to make to the political process.²⁷² However, as the eugenic notion of “mothers of the race” gained ascendancy in medical discourse, Susanne Klaussen notes that South African eugenicists were preoccupied “with the importance of motherhood and the danger of feminism.”²⁷³ Male doctors accused middle class English-speaking white women of being “selfish” for entering professions and limiting the number of white children they bore.²⁷⁴

Afrikaners also imbued motherhood with moral power. Prior to the South African War, the Afrikaner wife was constructed as strong, independent, virtuous and subservient to their husbands.²⁷⁵ However, publication of the suffering and resistance of Afrikaner women in concentration camps during the war caused the Afrikaner woman to be

²⁷⁰ Elizabeth van Heyningen, “Women and Gender in the South African War, 1899-1902” in *Basus’imbokodo, bawel’imilambo/They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers: Women in South African History*, ed. Nomboniso Gasa (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 113.

²⁷¹ “They were the peacemakers who could calm the troubled spirits and heal the broken hearts.” van Heyningen, “Women and Gender in the South African War, 1899-1902,” 113.

²⁷² Walker, “The Women’s Suffrage Movement,” 338.

²⁷³ Susanne Klaussen, “For the Sake of the Race: Eugenic Discourses of Feeble-mindedness and Motherhood in the South African Medical Record, 1903-1926,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23, no. 1 (March 1997): 32.

²⁷⁴ Klaussen, 44. C.T. Anderson’s Presidential Address to the British Medical Association branch in Cape Town in 1916 argued that training girls for motherhood “must be among the most important and sacred duties of mankind...[the good mother] is one who has firmly instilled into her the national duty and inestimable privilege of motherhood.” C.T. Anderson, “The Training of Our Girls,” *South African Medical Record* 14, no. 10 (May 1916), 147 quoted in Klaussen, 45.

²⁷⁵ Elsabe Brink, “Man-made Women: Gender, Class, and the Ideology of the *Volkesmoeder*,” in Walker, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa*, 279.

depicted not only as the cornerstone of the home but also as the central unifying force within the Afrikaner race. Afrikaner motherhood thus fulfilled a political role as well.²⁷⁶ Helen Bradford argues that the men's surrender, coupled with women's sufferings in camps during the war, led Afrikaner women to embrace motherhood following the war under the ideal of the *volkesmoeder* because, "[the children] must win back our freedom."²⁷⁷ Following WWI as many young, poor Afrikaner women moved to the cities to engage in paid employment, Afrikaner men propagated the *Boervrouw* as a role model for a new generation of Afrikaner women in the home. In 1918, Willem Potsma an ardent Afrikaner Nationalist argued, "A people are what its women are. The woman is the conscience of her nation as well as the measure of its values...and by the women can we measure the moral condition of the people."²⁷⁸ Louise Vincent argues that during the campaign for women's suffrage Afrikaner women challenged existing Afrikaner ideals about the proper role of Afrikaner women in society using motherhood as a "means of conferring legitimacy on their campaign for citizenship."²⁷⁹ Politically minded Afrikaner women in urban areas convinced rural Afrikaner women of the veld that suffrage was in

²⁷⁶ Ibid. Helen Bradford suggests that it was Afrikaner women who were the "fiercest advocates of war to the bitter end" and who were the most active proponents of a nationalist ideal between 1902 and 1914. Helen Bradford, "Regendering Afrikanerdom: the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War" in *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann, and Catherine Hall (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 207. Bradford cites the example of Isabella Steyn, wife of the President of the Free State who was arrested for refusing to ask her husband to surrender. She told her captors that women would continue the war to the end. When asked how long she thought that would be, she replied, "I expect and hope till the last cartridge is shot." (220).

²⁷⁷ Bradford, "Regendering Afrikanerdom: the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War," 214.

²⁷⁸ Brink, "Man-made Women: Gender, Class, and the Ideology of the *Volkesmoeder*," in Walker, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa*, 281.

²⁷⁹ Louise Vincent, "A Cake of Soap," 2. Early in the suffrage campaign, leading Afrikaner men argued that their women did not want the vote. According to one leading Nationalist, women preferred to "watch over the cradles of our young, nurse our old aged and sick, brighten our homes with cheer and lighten our burdens with sympathy... [not] the mess of pottage of the Hustings." C.J. Langehoven, "The Female Franchise and the Native Franchise," July 1909, quoted in Vincent, "A Cake of Soap," 6.

their interests as a practical matter to increase the Nationalist Party constituency. Their campaign was based on the dual nature of the *volkesmoeder*: mothers in the home and mothers of the nation.²⁸⁰

Significantly, neither English nor Afrikaans-speaking motherisms historically imagined that motherhood entitled them to mount a sustained independent moral critique of the ways men implemented the policies of white supremacy. In 1930, white women received the vote in order to maintain white supremacy not oppose it.

“These frail, fragile, fictitious beauties...”

The campaign by the Black Sash against the Senate Act departed from previous traditions of motherism among white women. In addition to contesting the National Party’s subversion of parliamentary democracy among white voters, the protests by the Black Sash from July through November 1955, also contested the removal of qualified, classified Coloured voters from the common roll. They challenged a policy intended to stabilize white supremacy as well as male attitudes about political activism among white women. During the months of July through November 1955, the English language newspapers delighted in carrying stories and political cartoons of the League “haunting” ministers and the ministers’ attempts to avoid the gauntlet of women in black sashes. The League’s haunts also occasioned incidents of physical mistreatment of the women by members of the nationalist youth movement, the *Juegbond*. In response to reports that the women had been pushed back so members of the *Juegbond* could stand with white sashes to attend Prime Minister Strijdom when he arrived at Jan Smuts Airport in Cape

²⁸⁰ Vincent, “A Cake of Soap,” 7.

Town in August, the Prime Minister told the press that the women had “invited” such treatment.²⁸¹ The physical abuse increased when the League haunted ministers at the opening of the National Party Congress in Bloemfontein in September. Sashes were ripped off several of the women who lined the steps to the Bloemfontein City Hall and one young man threatened the branch chairwoman, Mrs. O’Connor, saying, “I’ll hit you across the face as you have never been hit before.”²⁸² This threat was met with an icy stare. When the Prime Minister entered the hall, several women were pushed inside by students who shouted, “Come in and hear the truth.”²⁸³ Mr. Strijdom implied that the League was a front for the United Party saying, “They mourn for the death of the United Party” and Mr. Swart accused Mr. Strauss, leader of the UP, of shielding the party “behind the mourning bands of a group of silly women—foolish virgins of whom he wants to make heroines.” He also warned, “If [the League] are contemplating some illegal actions, then they are looking for trouble and they will get it too.”²⁸⁴ Mrs. O’Connor replied to them in a press statement, “We are not prepared to be cowed by ... insults and threats of violence by the *Juegbond* or anybody else [which] make us more determined to pursue our course...Our answer to the Prime Minister is reinforcements.”²⁸⁵ The following day more than thirty women from around the country joined the ranks of the Bloemfontein Branch as they continued to haunt the ministers.²⁸⁶

²⁸¹ “A Blow for Freedom,” *The Friend*, 16 September 1955, reproduced in Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 63-64.

²⁸² “A Blow for Freedom,” in Rogers, 63.

²⁸³ “A Blow for Freedom,” in Rogers, 64.

²⁸⁴ “A Blow for Freedom,” in Rogers, 63.

²⁸⁵ “A Blow for Freedom,” in Rogers, 64.

²⁸⁶ Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of Johannesburg Committee, 14 September 1955, 2. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

Mrs. Foley's comments about the incident were framed as a mother who mourned the lack of moral and courteous behavior among the young who were being led astray by the conduct of their male elders. She told the press sadly, "It is a pity that the younger generation has broken away from the traditional courtesy of the Afrikaner...it would have been more to Mr. Swart's credit if, instead of uttering veiled threats, he had deplored the offenders behaving like animals."²⁸⁷ For the rest of the week, ministers were met by women wearing black sashes wherever they went in Bloemfontein. Perhaps the watershed moment occurred when a photographer arrived to take a group photograph of the National Party Congress and women in black sashes formed up on either side of the delegates as the photograph was taken.²⁸⁸ Mrs. Foley chastised the ministers in a Letter to the Editor of the *Rand Daily Mail* published on 23 September. She spoke again as a mother who condemned the bad example being set by male politicians for future generations and articulated a mother's duty to oppose it. She wrote,

The women of South Africa who see what is happening to our beloved land and what will happen to our children if power-drunk politicians divide the people and engender hatred where none should exist, are determined that this must not be allowed to happen...However terrifying the black bull of 'Natism' may appear at the moment, the fearless fighter, conscience, shall slay it if all South Africans...allow him to take a strong stand and support him. If the Black Sash women can help in that fight for a harmonious community in which all children may grow up in security, they will be satisfied."²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ "A Blow for Freedom," in Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 64.

²⁸⁸ "Black Sash Women, with Rand Help, Dog Cabinet," *The Friend* 17 September 1955, reproduced in Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 64-65.

²⁸⁹ Ruth Foley, "We Shall Go On Silently—The Resolve of the Black Sash Women," *Rand Daily Mail* 23 September 1955 reproduced in Rogers, 66. Note that Mrs. Foley described "conscience" as a male who needed support. While this characterization imagines a woman's place as subordinate, it also implies that men were too weak to sustain a moral conscience without women.

As the intense confrontations of the hauntings persisted, so did the heated rhetoric from National Party supporters. In Port Elizabeth, Mr. Swart dodged the women by using the entrance reserved for blacks while supporters shouted, “Only Kaffirs speak English” and “The only time these women laugh is when their children play with Blacks.”²⁹⁰ Mr. J.W. du Plessis National Party M.P. for Bloemfontein argued that the women were being forced or intimidated by their husbands into joining the “Black Sash Commando.”²⁹¹ Then on 13 October, the *Juegbond* attempted to crush women who haunted Mr. Erasmus at a National Party rally in East London. According to Mrs. Curry, chairman of the League’s East London branch, young people linked arms in front of 32 Black Sash women and backed them up against the walls of the hall. “Then they trampled on the women’s feet and jabbed them in the ribs with their elbows... Whenever they relieved the pressure on the women, a man, aged about 40, urged them on to greater effort by shouting ‘Push! Push!’ [The women] never once flinched or retaliated although I am certain that many of them were bruised.”²⁹² Noting that the group of *Juegbonders* included children from six to eighteen years of age, Mrs. Currie spoke as a mother to express her dismay, lamenting the bad example of male leaders. She said, “It is a great pity, a tragedy in fact, that youths are being taught such things by their elders. It appears as if these children will be brought up in what amounts to an atmosphere of racial hatred...the children, egged on by the man, seemed to think it was a terrific joke.”²⁹³

²⁹⁰ “Black Sash Women Praised for Demeanor as Insults Were Hurlled,” *Johannesburg Star* 12 October 1955 reproduced in Rogers, 78-79.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² “Black Sash Women Were Jostled, Crushed Against Walls, Says Member,” *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 October 1955 reproduced in Rogers, 82.

²⁹³ Ibid.

As popular accounts of the haunts continued to receive positive press, the National Party rhetoric took a new tack articulated in an article by G.F. van L. Froneman, in *The Forum*.²⁹⁴ He portrayed the League as a tool of the United Party's emasculated political opposition. He also compared them to the failed Torch Commando, a political pressure group of liberal WWII veterans who were unable to sustain their organization due to division over extending the franchise to Africans.²⁹⁵ van Froneman described the League as the "foolish virgins" of the Bible in an effort to minimize the moral authority which motherhood conferred on women among both English and Afrikaans-speaking communities.²⁹⁶ He called the women "these frail, fragile, fictitious beauties...Weeping Winnies and sad-faced Susies [who] are the true symbol of democratic constitutional opposition."²⁹⁷ He argued that it would be "foolish to argue with them, because it is foolish to argue with any woman who makes a public spectacle of herself to achieve her aims...they have no oil in their lamps and they will shed about just as much light as their forerunners, the Torch Commando did..."²⁹⁸ van Froneman repeated the resolve of the NP leaders to ignore the women's protest while condemning the League's audacity in publicly opposing the ministers. He announced, "neither the members of the Cabinet nor the members of the National Party are in the least impressed by their actions; on the

²⁹⁴ G. F. van L. Froneman, "Nationalist View of the Sash Commando," *The Forum*, October 1955, reproduced in Rogers, 86.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ van Froneman, "Nationalist View of the Sash Commando," in Rogers 87. In the parable of the ten virgins, Jesus spoke of ten virgins invited to a wedding party. Five of the virgins were foolish and failed to fill their lamps with oil causing them to miss the wedding supper. See Matt. 25:1-13. The parable has many and varied interpretations. It may be that the Nationalists were responding to the League's moral condemnation of their actions by impugning their authority as mothers and charging that the women neglected their own moral duty in the home.

²⁹⁷ van Froneman, "Nationalist View of the Sash Commando," in Rogers 87.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

contrary, their actions are regarded as the silly and misguided sublimations of frustrated females...”²⁹⁹ Articulating the patriarchal paradigm that only women who knew their place were worthy of respect, he concluded, “We members of the National Party have a very high regard for our womenfolk and we certainly do not want to abuse any woman, but when women act in such a silly and undignified way, through making a public spectacle of themselves, we are bound to lose our respect for them.”³⁰⁰

On 27 October 1955, less than two weeks after the confrontation between the women of the Black Sash and the NP in East London, the multi-racial Federation of South African Women (FSAW) marched on the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest the announcement in September that the government would begin issuing passes to African women.³⁰¹ The women of the FSAW were inspired by the League’s Pretoria march in June, even though they had not been invited to participate.³⁰² Two thousand women, most of whom were African, descended on the Union Buildings and sat in the amphitheatre where no one had thought to place signs limiting seating to whites.³⁰³ Although the government ministers refused to meet with them, Lilian Ngoyi, Rahima

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, 143.

³⁰² Ibid; Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 184. Helen Joseph and several white women of the COD joined the Black Sash march in Pretoria to show solidarity with the Black Sash and in the hope that the Black Sash would affiliate with the FSAW. Helen Joseph, *Tomorrow’s Sun* (New York: John Day, 1967), 69-70. As will be discussed in the following chapters, there were other contacts between the FSAW and the Black Sash between 1956 and 1960. An undated letter from Helen Joseph to the Black Sash reminisced about the Pretoria march of the Black Sash and invited the Black Sash to send greetings or observers to the National Congress of the FSAW in December 1956. This letter was presented at the Treason Trial and the newspapers commented that “a letter from the Black Sash was found by Sergeant Cootzoo during his search.” The article did not mention that the Black Sash declined the invitation by return letter. The Black Sash, Circular 25 (19 February, 1957), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 5.

³⁰³ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 184-185.

Moosa, Helen Joseph, and Sophie Williams, representing women from diverse races, darted inside and placed signed protests outside the doors of Cabinet Ministers.³⁰⁴ The Pretoria demonstration by the FSAW illustrated that black women were also determined to raise a moral voice of opposition to apartheid in the public political discourse of the nation and it was widely reported in the press. Attempting to deny black women's agency, Prime Minister Strijdom described the demonstration in the press as "scandalous, because it was incited by Europeans."³⁰⁵

On 4 November, 1955 a notice appeared in the *Government Gazette* which announced, "The Senate is dissolved."³⁰⁶ In response, the League published notices in newspapers in all major cities urging women and men to join a demonstration against the dissolution of the Senate on Saturday, 12 November. Newspapers published commentaries about the courage of the women and the failure of men to act. The *Rand Daily Mail* suggested, "The women have shown that the voice of democracy cannot be silenced by manipulated votes and packed assemblies and it is time that others took up their cause."³⁰⁷ The *Natal Mercury* chastised South African men for their failure to act opining, "The March of the Black Sash women tomorrow in protest against the iniquitous Senate Act, is a sharp example to the men of this country...it is a thousand pities that the men of this country have not captured some of the imaginative determination of the

³⁰⁴ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 185.

³⁰⁵ Quoted in Walker, 187. Walker does not indicate whether the Prime Minister was referring to the Black Sash or the white women in the FSAW. It is likely that he was referring to both.

³⁰⁶ Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 95.

³⁰⁷ "The Call of the Sash," *Rand Daily Mail* 24 November 1955, reproduced in Rogers, 104.

women in opposing [the Senate Act].”³⁰⁸ League demonstrations occurred in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pretoria, Durban, Bloemfontein, Pietermaritzburg and smaller towns around the country illustrating the national impact of the movement.³⁰⁹ The leaders of the League prepared an “Order of Service” to be followed at all demonstrations.³¹⁰ The “Order of Service” included a “Dedication” composed by Alan Paton at the request of the League which pledged to uphold “the ideals by which our union was inspired, of mutual trust and forbearance, sanctity of word, of courage for the future, and of peace and justice for all peoples and groups.”³¹¹ The Dedication concluded, “We pledge ourselves to resist any diminishment of the same, confident that this duty is required of us and that history and our children will defend us.”³¹²

While the marches captured the attention of many onlookers, the League’s call to men and women to join them in their protest had not been as effective as the leaders had hoped. The League was not deterred by the smaller numbers and emphasized the varied locations of the demonstrations.³¹³ In Pretoria, League members stood vigil outside the Raadsaal when the new Senators were elected and they stood on the steps of City Hall in Johannesburg and Cape Town. The numbers of attendees were now in the hundreds even

³⁰⁸ “The Women Set the Example,” *Natal Mercury* 24 November 1955, reproduced in Rogers, 103.

³⁰⁹ Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of a Conference Held at Port Elizabeth, 29-30 November 1955, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF2552 reel 3.

³¹⁰ The Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, “Order of Service,” (25 November, 1955), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection” MF2552 reel 4.

³¹¹ Dorrie Paton to Mrs. Green, 23 November 1955, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4.

³¹² “Dedication,” Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4. The “Dedication” was read at all Black Sash meetings from 1955 to 1959 when Paton modified it at the request of the Sash to exclude any reference to the formation of the Union. Minutes of National Council Meeting, June 1959, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3.

³¹³ Minutes of a Conference Held at Port Elizabeth, 29-30 November, 1955, Black Sash Society Papers.

though membership in local branches continued to rise.³¹⁴ The League went into recess during December as members were busy with Christmas and the leaders of the League were busy planning a convoy to Cape Town to protest the opening of the reconfigured Parliament and the Separate Representation of Voters Act.³¹⁵

“The voice of the women shall be heard!”

On 9 February, 1956 a convoy of women travelled 1,000 miles through cities and towns around South Africa to converge on the opening of the joint session of Parliament in Cape Town when the new Senate was seated.³¹⁶ Women who could not afford the trip held vigils at various municipal centers around the country during the meeting of the joint session. The final confrontation between the Women’s Defense of the Constitution League and the National Party over the Senate Act and its progeny, the Separate Representation of Voters Act, had begun. On 13 February, the convoy of 156 cars drove at 5 M.P.H. through Cape Town to the Parliament buildings through a “dense and demonstrative” diverse crowd of supporters.³¹⁷ At 11:00 A.M. and for the next 48 hours, the League stood vigil in front of Parliament in two hour shifts of at least thirty women each.³¹⁸ On 14, February, Mrs. Foley, Mrs. Sinclair and several other League leaders took their seats in the visitors’ bay. When the Prime Minister asked leave to introduce

³¹⁴ Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 107.

³¹⁵ Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of Committee Meeting on 7 December 1955, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF2552 reel 1.

³¹⁶ Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, “Convoy Report,” Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF2552 reel 1.

³¹⁷ “Convoy Report,” 1 Black Sash Society Papers. Each car carried four women.

³¹⁸ The women were subjected at various times to barrages of rotten vegetables and on at least one occasion, “a youth” inside the grounds stuck several members with a hatpin. “Convoy Report,” 2.

the Separate Representation of Voters Act, they put on their Black Sashes.³¹⁹ The bay attendant immediately snatched away the sashes, whereupon the women pinned black roses to their dresses. These too were torn off by the bay attendant.³²⁰ Mrs. Foley and Mrs. Sinclair, then “stumped” from the bay, followed by the other leaders and Mrs. Sinclair confronted the Clerk of the House in the corridor. “On whose authority,” she demanded to know, “was a part of my wearing apparel taken from me?”³²¹ The Clerk of the House abjectly apologized to her and she and the others were returned to the visitors’ bay wearing their roses.³²² The next day as word of the altercation became public, sympathetic women M.P.’s wore black rose corsages and men wore black roses in their lapels in solidarity with the League.³²³ The Separate Representation of Voters Act was debated into the early hours of the morning while forty women stood vigil outside and silent, sympathetic crowds packed the sidewalk along Parliament Street.³²⁴ At dawn the League draped a large black sash across the steps of the Senate building.³²⁵ When the session finally ended at 10:30 P.M. on February 15, the Separate Representation of Voters Act had passed with a majority of 174 to 74. As the M.P.’s left the building they walked through a gauntlet of 300 white women wearing black sashes, standing in silent

³¹⁹ “Convoy Report,” 1, Black Sash Society Papers.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ “Convoy Report,” 1-2, Black Sash Society Papers.

³²² “Convoy Report,” 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

³²³ “Convoy Report,” 2, Black Sash Society Papers. Many members of the general public also donned the black rose. The Black Sash adopted the black rose as its emblem during their national convention in Bloemfontein in April, 1956. Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of a National Conference at Bloemfontein, (26-28 April 1955) 24, Black Sash Society Papers. Mrs. Foley and Mrs. Sinclair received their tickets as the guests of Helen Suzman, a member of the Black Sash who was a United Party M.P in 1956. Later she was elected to Parliament as a Progressive Party M.P. and was often the lone voice of opposition to apartheid legislation. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 57.

³²⁴ “Convoy Report,” 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

³²⁵ The sash was removed by the cleaning crew when they came on duty at 7:00 A.M. Ibid.

condemnation on Parliament Street. Only Mr. Louw had the bad manners to bump the women's legs with his briefcase as he exited.³²⁶

The qualified non-racial franchise which had existed in the Cape since 1853 was gone and only classified whites were eligible to vote. Knowing that this outcome was inevitable, the leaders of the League met at Stellenbosch on 12 February to determine their next course of action before they began their public demonstrations. The burning issue facing the women was what to do next. Should they disband or should they continue? If they decided to continue the organization, what should be the policy of the organization? Should the group change its name? Should the group cooperate with any other movement? Although the leaders agreed that the League should continue, they expressed many different views on policy and goals. Their views reflected the diverse attitudes of both moderate and liberal English and Afrikaans-speaking white voters. Leaders of the Johannesburg region were split over future policy. Some thought that the League should continue to press for unity between whites and emphasize educating the white electorate.³²⁷ Others, including Mrs. Sinclair, thought the League should take a broad moral stance supporting the rights of all individuals, including blacks.³²⁸ Mrs. Foley leaned toward conservative opinion but sought to find common ground with the more liberal group.³²⁹ Leaders from the Middleburg Branch wanted the League to focus

³²⁶ Convoy Report," 2-3, Black Sash Society Papers.

³²⁷ Minutes of a Meeting of the Women's Defense of the Constitution League held at 'Blaauwklip', Stellenbosch 12 February, 1956, 3. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3.

³²⁸ Minutes of a Meeting at Stellenbosch, 3, Black Sash Society Papers.

³²⁹ Minutes of a Meeting at Stellenbosch, 1, Black Sash Society Papers.

on educating rural Afrikaner women.³³⁰ Mrs. Stott, of the Cape Western region, felt that the League should not do anything that would alienate the United Party as many members of the League were also members of the United Party.³³¹ In the end, they agreed that Mrs. Foley and Mrs. Sinclair should write a statement of policy.³³² The leaders also agreed to recommend that the League change its name to the Black Sash.³³³ The stage was set for the national conference in Bloemfontein.

On 26 March, 1956 the League issued a “Statement on Policy of the Black Sash” to the press.³³⁴ That night they held a public meeting attended by over 500 people in Johannesburg where Mrs. Sinclair spoke of the women’s intent to broaden their protest rather than disband.³³⁵ The broadened policy was controversial both within the Black Sash and among the white community because it implied that the Black Sash supported majority rule. The press release stated, “The Black Sash stands for political morality. It will work for democracy which is rule by the majority with respect to the rights of minorities.”³³⁶ By embracing broad liberal principles of democratic government, the “Statement on Policy of the Black Sash” shared general commonalities with the “Women’s Charter” adopted by the FSAW in 1954 and the “Freedom Charter” adopted

³³⁰ Minutes of a Meeting at Stellenbosch, 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

³³¹ Minutes of a Meeting at Stellenbosch, 3, Black Sash Society Papers.

³³² Minutes of a Meeting at Stellenbosch, 4, Black Sash Society Papers.

³³³ Minutes of a Meeting at Stellenbosch, 3, Black Sash Society Papers.

³³⁴ The Black Sash, “Statement on Policy of the Black Sash, 26 March, 1956,” Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3.

³³⁵ The Black Sash, “The Chairman’s Report to the First Annual Conference of the Women’s Defense of the Constitution League,” 3. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection microfilm: MF 2552 reel 5.

³³⁶ The Black Sash, Circular 8 “Statement on Policy of the Black Sash,” (26 March, 1956), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 5.

by the Congress of the People at Kliptown in June, 1955.³³⁷ Mrs. Sinclair's speech also began with a broad statement of liberal democratic principles. She told the stunned assembly, "A democracy is rule by the majority with respect for the rights of the minorities. Without this respect, democracy becomes dictatorship." Repudiating in general terms, the notion that the South African government existed to perpetuate white privilege, she continued, "A government must have the trust of all its people to govern successfully..." It must not remove or diminish the personal liberties of the individual; it must respect the rights of the minorities... If any government abuses its power in the face of widespread opposition from the minorities, then it forfeits the trust of the people."³³⁸

Despite her apparent adoption of liberal democratic principles of government, Mrs. Sinclair's speech also revealed ambiguities of white liberal ideology in South Africa because it did not articulate the right of citizens to vote without regard to race, color, creed or belief as did the Freedom Charter.³³⁹ Mrs. Sinclair focused instead on three bills which threatened specific liberties among the white, African, and classified Coloured

³³⁷ "The Women's Charter" states, "We... hereby declare our aim of striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions and customs that discriminate against us as women, and that deprive us in any way of our inherent right to the advantages, responsibilities and opportunities that society offers to any one section of the population.anc.org, historical documents online, <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/history/women/wcharter.html> (accessed 13 March 2010). "The Freedom Charter" provides in pertinent part, "...only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex, or belief... All people shall have the right to vote for and to stand and to stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws... The rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, colour or sex." anc.org, historical documents online, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/charter.html> (accessed 13 March 2010).

³³⁸ Jean Sinclair, "Statement on Policy of the Black Sash," (Speech, Johannesburg, 26 March 1956). Black Sash Society Papers.

³³⁹ Over the ensuing months, the National Party and the United Party used the statement of policy as a basis on which to claim that the Black Sash supported a universal franchise and was aligned with radical whites in the COD and Africans in the ANC.

populations.³⁴⁰ She addressed intimidation against white women who feared that if they opposed the government, "...their husband's business might be affected or their children might be victimized at school..."³⁴¹ She also referred to the injustice of forced removals in the context of depriving Africans access to appeal in the courts.³⁴² Finally, she connected the legitimacy of continuing protest by the Black Sash on the basis of the moral power of motherhood, stating, "It matters not who, or what section of our population is threatened with discrimination, injustice, or loss of liberty, we shall protest on moral grounds... The power of women is immense and when they take their stand on moral grounds it is incalculable."³⁴³ Mrs. Sinclair issued a call to action connecting women's moral courage with liberal ideals insisting, "We have got the courage to protest...it is our duty to rise in moral protest against the undemocratic attitude of the present government." Mrs. Sinclair concluded defiantly, "The voice of the women will be heard. We shall insist that a halt be called. We of the Black Sash stand for unity, integrity and political morality and we shall carry on until we get it in public life in South Africa!"³⁴⁴

³⁴⁰ Sinclair, "Statement on Policy of the Black Sash," 1-2. The Deportation Bill permitted the government to deport anyone who was not born in South Africa without recourse to the courts even if that person was a naturalized citizen. The Prohibition of Interdicts Bill permitted the government to remove Africans from land without monetary compensation or recourse to the courts. The Cape Coloured Voters' Bill removed the right of qualified, classified Coloured voters to stand for election to the Cape Provincial Council. Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 59.

³⁴¹ Sinclair, "Statement on Policy of the Black Sash," 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁴² Ibid. This portion of the "Statement on Policy" demonstrates the social distance between the concerns of the middle-class women of the Black Sash and black South Africans by referencing the fears of whites whose primary concern was loss of their black servants who might be removed from informal settlements. "Why did they not protest before, when they thought this couldn't happen?" she asked. Sinclair, "Statement on Policy," 2-3, Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Sinclair, "Statement on Policy of the Black Sash," 3, Black Sash Society Papers.

Delegates from branches of the League assembled at the League's first national conference in Bloemfontein on 26-28 April, 1956. During the conference delegates approved changing the name of the League to the Black Sash and adopted the Black Rose as its symbol.³⁴⁵ The crucial topic of debate however was the meaning of "political morality." The debate over political morality and the ratification of a constitution which limited membership to white women illustrate the contradictions of South African liberalism's inability to confront the political structures of white supremacy while embracing liberal principles of equality before the law, representative democracy, and freedom of speech, assembly and religion. The Black Sash leadership struggled during the 1950's to keep the Black Sash from shattering over the issue of the franchise and whether the primary focus of the organization should be educating the white electorate or opposing laws that increasingly oppressed and radicalized the black population. The struggle to maintain the Black Sash as a national organization required the leaders of the Black Sash to mediate regional and ideological differences regarding strategy and avoiding, as long as possible, taking a definitive position on the franchise.

It is important to note that the Bloemfontein conference took place at a time when the NP was actively seeking to discredit the Black Sash and the UP was beginning its drive to get the Black Sash to disband. The multi-layered opposition to the Black Sash by the two most powerful white political parties indicates that their male leaders were concerned about the moral power of the Black Sash to influence the electorate. In January, 1956, a chain letter circulated among the Afrikaans-speaking community in

³⁴⁵ Women's Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of a National Conference held at Bloemfontein (26-28 April, 1955), Black Sash Society Papers.

Sabie. The letter referenced a circular purportedly written by the Black Sash which encouraged a boycott of Afrikaner businesses.³⁴⁶ On 27 April, 1956, Blaar Coetzee, National Party M.P., announced in Parliament that he was in possession of a “circular” drafted by Mrs. Ruth Foley of the Black Sash which supported a boycott of Afrikaner businesses. He and Mr. Louw both claimed to have a copy of the document.³⁴⁷ J. Hamilton Russell, United Party M.P., denounced the claim as “scandalous” but no other United Party MP stepped forward to defend the Black Sash.³⁴⁸ Although Mr. Russell would later provide proof that the circular was drafted by two NP members in Sabie in an effort to discredit the Black Sash, by April, great damage had been done to their credibility in the Eastern Transvaal, the Orange Free State and among rural Afrikaners.³⁴⁹ The boycott hoax coincided with reports from Black Sash branches that members’ husbands were being threatened by their employers because of the activities of their wives in the Black Sash.³⁵⁰ Branches reported that the UP had urged its female members to resign and urged its male members to force their wives resign from the Black Sash.³⁵¹ Even Donald Molteno, a trusted advisor to the Black Sash leadership during its early years, urged the Black Sash to disband. He did not think they would become a mass

³⁴⁶ The Black Sash, Minutes of National Council Meeting, November 1956. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3. Allegedly, one of the firms listed as subjects of the boycott was a firm which sold tea and was in competition with a firm in which Mrs. Foley was a shareholder. This, the Nationalists implied, undermined her moral stance. Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 224. The Black Sash did not issue an immediate denial because they were conducting an extensive investigation into the matter. Minutes of National Council Meeting, November 1956, Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁴⁷ Rogers, *The Black Sash*, 220-221.

³⁴⁸ Rogers, 220.

³⁴⁹ Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein, (26-28 April 1956), Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁵⁰ Minutes of National Conference Bloemfontein, (26-28 April 1956), “Bosfeld Region Report,” Black Sash Society Papers

³⁵¹ Minutes of National Council Meeting, November 1956, “Lowveld and Border Region Reports,” Black Sash Society Papers.

movement as they were united by a “shared irritation over a sneaky manoeuvre” rather than committed to opposing apartheid.³⁵² Mrs. Hahn of Springs in the Southern Transvaal Region reported that a “servant woman” of a Springs councilor (party affiliation unknown) told authorities that women wearing Black Sashes entered the location and encouraged African women to burn their passes. However, the branch determined that the woman had no connection to the Black Sash.³⁵³ African women’s opposition to passes was increasingly militant during the early months of 1956 as well. In March, only a month before the League’s Bloemfontein National Conference, African women in Winburg, a small farming community in the Orange Free State, were induced by the government to accept Reference Books (passes) voluntarily.³⁵⁴ By 22 March, the municipality had issued Reference Books to 1,429 women.³⁵⁵ This alarmed the ANC who sent Lilian Ngoyi of the FSAW and two African men to Winburg. Following a meeting of the Winburg ANCWL on 8 April, the women marched to the police station and publicly burned their passes.³⁵⁶

“We Must Fully Realize What We Are Fighting For...”

The sharp debate over the implications of “Political Morality” in the “Statement on Policy of the Black Sash” occurred in the context of increasing opposition to the League from white men and increasing militancy by African women over the issue of passes. Reports that white women from around the nation were resigning from the

³⁵² Quoted in Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 47. Mr. Molteno’s comment shows that attitudes discounting women’s political activity were not limited to Afrikaner Nationalist men.

³⁵³ Minutes of National Conference Bloemfontein (26-28 April 1956), “Southern Transvaal Region Report,” Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁵⁴ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 192.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Walker, 192; Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, 143.

League and that even the militant Orange Free State Branch was becoming less active, supported the argument by conservative members of the League that political morality should be interpreted narrowly, focused on unjust laws rather than the franchise, and aimed at education and unity among the white electorate. The debate also demonstrated that even in 1956, the white women of the Black Sash understood that there were long term implications of their stand on political morality.

The Stellenbosch Branch raised the issue of the franchise because they wanted a more definitive statement on the rights of black South Africans. They felt that the application of moral principles to dealings with the non-Europeans “could not be ignored.”³⁵⁷ As Mrs. Spottiswoode of Stellenbosch opined, “This matter we must all agree is one of the most vital and controversial in this country today; and if the League is to mean anything, it must make a statement on our attitude toward this question.”³⁵⁸ She explained, “We are not asking the Black Sash to concoct a political platform. Some statement on a broad moral basis has to come from the Black Sash.”³⁵⁹ Mrs. J.F. Hill of Pietermaritzburg expressed dismay that the national executive had made a statement of policy and she was “unsure on what particular lines this required statement would have to be made.” She did not think a more definitive statement on the rights of black South Africans was necessary. “The principles of liberty and freedom have been stated,” she added.³⁶⁰ Mrs. Green who chaired this segment of the meeting, pointed out that the League “must move forward as one body. Not one branch in one direction without

³⁵⁷ Women’s Defense of the Constitution League, Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein (26- 28 April 1956), 12. Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

knowing what the position was.”³⁶¹ Mrs. Sinclair quoted from her speech, “liberty is indivisible. If any one section of the population loses any of its freedoms, then we ourselves have, in fact, lost that freedom ... The statement of policy was made after we had been asked to make a statement on our future policy.” She added, “It surely meets our policy now.”³⁶² She insisted that the policy looked to the future, arguing, “We are not going back, and this referred to all future legislation which was going to remove privileges held by anyone. Things which had happened in the past were deplorable.”³⁶³ Mrs. Brink of the Northern Transvaal Region wanted the Black Sash to adopt the substance of the UN Resolution of 1952 which held that the interests of a multi-racial society are best served by a government for all without regard to race, colour or creed. “This is the short statement of the general policy of the Black Sash,” she argued.³⁶⁴ Mrs. J. Hamilton Russell of Pietermaritzburg, encouraged the Stellenbosch Branch to withdraw their resolution because a definitive stand on the issue of non-European franchise rights was a “party-political football and we leave ourselves open to criticism.” She pleaded, “Let us not do anything to divide ourselves.”³⁶⁵ Mrs. Green felt that this was the time for members to say honestly if the Black Sash were becoming too liberal in their attitude because, “members have to be fully aware of the implications.”³⁶⁶ She called for a vote and the delegates agreed unanimously “to broaden our policy to include all acts

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein (26-28 April, 1956), 13, Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

which have deprived us of our liberties, and all Bills [sic] which threaten to deprive us of our liberty.”³⁶⁷

However, Mrs. Cluver, a delegate from Johannesburg, was not satisfied. She continued to argue for a more specific policy on extension of the franchise. She told the group, “The removal of the Coloured voters [was] against the basis of human rights and Christian principles... I have considered for a long time if I should raise the most contentious point of all—namely the franchise...should not the vote be given to every adult, to those able to use it with discrimination?”³⁶⁸ This question led to more contentious debate. Both Mrs. Dora Hill of Johannesburg and Mrs. Spottiswoode of the Western Cape argued that the Black Sash should maintain its broad moral stance. “The strength of the Black Sash lays entirely with things on a moral basis. We cannot delve into things which might be party-political,” Mrs. Spottiswoode argued.³⁶⁹ Mrs. Hill agreed. “I would like to see the vote extended, but it would be wrong for the Black Sash to start going into this issue. It would bring division and would bring the Black Sash into the sphere of party politics.”³⁷⁰ But Mrs. Brink replied, “One [has] to stand by the courage of one’s convictions. I do not believe that expediency is expedient. The United Party has shown that.”³⁷¹ Mrs. Stott of the Western Cape told the group that privately, she was “thrilled” with the tone of the discussion but at the same time, she was upset at

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein (26-28 April 1956), 14 Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein (26-28 April 1956), 15, Black Sash Society Papers.

the “vast amount of silence.”³⁷² This elicited a response from Mrs. Corrigan of Pietermaritzburg who said that her region had been in favor of the statement of policy as it was simply stating Black Sash principles. “We understood political morality,” she explained, “[as] the moral or immoral way in which the laws were applied to all sections of our country; but, listening to Mrs. Cluver, it would seem that we are concerned with political legislation and political rights.” She cautioned against moving too fast. “However liberal one may be,” she contended, “it is a grave mistake to advocate that every mental adult should have the vote, and we should not try to take the whole of the Black Sash with us.”³⁷³ Mrs. Fisher, an observer from Johannesburg, said that she was merely seeking information and in her opinion, “...we are quite off the beam...why are we discussing the franchise?” she asked. “Our task is not the formation of a new political party.”³⁷⁴ Mrs. Foley was incredulous. “Mrs. Cluver is surely not seriously advocating any sort of franchise for the non-Europeans.”³⁷⁵ Mrs. Foley’s outburst caused Mrs. Cluver to attempt to explain her position further. She said, “We must fully realize what we are fighting for. If we talk about political morality we must not leave it half way. [I am not saying] we must specifically state that we intended to consider the franchise, but the implication was there.”³⁷⁶ Mrs. O’Connor of the Orange Free State Region said that Mrs. Russell’s statement covered their stand. “If we are drawn into a statement on policy on the non-Europeans, then we would be on dangerous ground...If we maintained our

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

moral stand, then we would be fulfilling our policy without sticking out our necks.”³⁷⁷ Mrs. Sandenburgh of the Lowveld region told the delegates that Lowveld agreed with the broad policy but had not discussed it in the context of the “non-European vote.”³⁷⁸ Mrs. Barker, speaking for the Johannesburg region assured the delegates that Johannesburg had not re-started the debate irresponsibly. “People were apt to talk glibly of ‘political morality’ ...[and] they did not understand the meaning of political morality...The lengths to which Mrs. Cluver had gone had made people think, and it was a tremendous lesson that we have learned.”³⁷⁹ She wanted everyone to understand the range of implications raised by their policy. “Political morality goes very deep, and we must understand... If we say we stand for political morality, then we must be prepared to go into it much deeper than we have.”³⁸⁰

Attempting to defuse the contentiousness of the debate and find common ground, Mrs. Sinclair again defended the “Statement of Policy” and declared what she meant in drafting it. “We are protesting against the deprivation of rights—for that is immoral,” she said. “We are protesting against immoral legislation and the Government’s immoral attitude to government.” Reaffirming the classic Cape liberal ideology of ‘civilized rights for civilized men,’ Mrs. Sinclair said, “The non-European is still in the process of evolution and development, it is not our function to lay down a policy which would make

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein (26-28 April 1956), 15, Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁸⁰ Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein (26-28 April, 1956), 15-16, Black Sash Society Papers.

us party political.”³⁸¹ Mrs. Foley agreed. She said that she believed in “absolute morality, or in none at all.... When we talked about rights, we meant rights for all sections of the community...the Black Sash could not commit itself to a problem which even the party politicians could not solve.”³⁸² This was a relief to many delegates and the Border, Cape Eastern, and Transvaal regions expressed support for an interpretation of political morality limited to the “deprivation of rights of all our population.”³⁸³ Mrs. Davidoff of Johannesburg said that she hoped each delegate realized the importance of this policy and “knew what they were doing.” She told the delegates prophetically,

The Black Sash has started down a difficult and long road. We will be asked our opinions on many problems, on every facet of this complex, multi-racial society. Were we satisfied? Had every region analyzed the statement...and made sure that we are 100% behind the statement on policy? The Black Sash had achieved something so far reaching that it is impossible to appreciate how far they had gone. An historic trail had been blazed by women who had previously not thought deeply or clearly.”³⁸⁴

Mrs. Barry Smith, a delegate from Durban, spoke out honestly and restarted the debate. “We felt that the policy of the Black Sash had seemed a plain and straightforward statement...Now all sorts of implications had been read into it of which [we] had been unaware and which made [us] uneasy.”³⁸⁵ Mrs. Corrigall agreed. “Everyone [in her branch] had agreed that they were against the deprivation of liberties held by all sections of the population but they could go no further [than that].”³⁸⁶ Mrs. Dey opined that the

³⁸¹ Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein (26-28 April, 1956), 15 16, Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein (26-28 April, 1956), 17, Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

“contentious point hinged on the meaning of ‘political morality’ and that it was necessary to have a clearer definition. Things had been thrown in which had nothing to do with the Black Sash.”³⁸⁷ Mrs. Foley said, “Johannesburg has claimed that their conception of morality was to introduce the franchise for everyone in South Africa...but this was contrary to Union.”³⁸⁸ Mrs. Pirie, of the Cape Eastern branch asked if the wording of the policy could not be changed to leave out “political morality” as no one appeared to be able to define it.³⁸⁹ But Mrs. Brink retorted, “There is a positive standard of political morality if we supported democracy...The rights of the minorities were not respected and none of us were advocating anything but a positive standard in democracy.”³⁹⁰ At this point Mrs. Dora Hill, a member of the National Executive and delegate from Johannesburg attempted to mediate a compromise. She argued, “We are a protest movement and not a party political movement. We had to accept those limitations or we would get into difficulties.... Perhaps ...the implication was one which they could see in the future but need not now accept as a policy.”³⁹¹ Ultimately, the leaders agreed that the statement of policy was a “general attitude” as it was “the nearest the conference could get to a compromise.”³⁹²

The extraordinary debate over the meaning of the notion of political reality reveals the many layered complexities confronting the women of the Black Sash. A

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein (26-28 April, 1956), 18, Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ibid, 18.

³⁹² Minutes of National Conference at Bloemfontein (26-28 April 1956), 18, Black Sash Society Papers.

majority of delegates clearly preferred to adopt liberal principles in general terms and apply them to oppression generally. Although the women had engaged in intensive confrontations with the NP government and particular ministers over the Separate Representation of Voters Act, it was quite another thing to advocate extending the franchise to Africans. It was easier to demonstrate against the government when the cause was popular with white voters as had been the case with the Senate Act; it was more difficult to advocate for political rights for Africans. During this debate, the women were confronted with the contradiction between universal liberal principles they advocated so ardently and the application of those principles beyond mere rhetoric. Should they focus on educating whites about the general immorality of apartheid or should they focus on specific unjust laws? How could they navigate these issues and maintain the Black Sash as a national organization? What purpose did they fulfill? The women asked these questions at every succeeding national conference over the next 40 years.

“A Long and Difficult Road...”

At the end of the Bloemfontein National Conference, the delegates ratified a constitution which limited membership to women “citizens.”³⁹³ Effectively this provision limited membership to white women. Historians have questioned this decision charging that it limited the effectiveness of the Black Sash.³⁹⁴ Overlooking the depth and complexity of the debate over political morality, their critiques have focused on the decision to limit membership to white women. Some scholars have concluded that the

³⁹³ The Black Sash, Constitution, Article 3, Black Sash Society Papers.

³⁹⁴ Gwendolyn Carter characterized the failure to start out as a multi-racial organization as the League’s, “greatest initial mistake.” Michelman, *The Black Sash of South Africa*, 35.

decision to limit membership to white women was based primarily on social distance between white and black women and the unwillingness of members to apply the lofty ideals of equality before the law to social equality. While admitting that the decision was a “moral lapse,” Jean Sinclair argued that had the League adopted a policy of multi-racial membership, “there would have been no League” as most white women would not have joined an organization in 1956 which involved “direct association with non-whites.”³⁹⁵ The archival record lends credibility to her claim. The debate over the implications of political morality demonstrates the wide divisions among members over extending the franchise to blacks but members never debated the clause limiting membership to women citizens. Michelman concludes that the women, “like the community of which they were a part, [were] for the most part, unaware that [black women] might be filled with discontent over their traditional social and political inferiority...[The Black Sash] were convinced of the legitimacy of their way of life, and they were out to defend, not to change it.”³⁹⁶ Yet the debate regarding the implications of political morality demonstrates that the early leaders of the Black Sash were neither ill-informed about the black aspirations for full citizenship nor unthinking supporters of white supremacy. Spink offers a more sophisticated analysis. She claims that many in the Black Sash, “...sincerely believed that they would have a better chance of righting wrongs brought about by arbitrarily enfranchised whites if they remained the conscience of the white

³⁹⁵ Quoted in Michelman, 36.

³⁹⁶ Michelman, 36.

electorate, a voice of protest from within.”³⁹⁷ This argument was advanced by some members who opposed opening membership on a non-racial basis during the early 1960’s. Subsequent events which will be examined in the next chapters demonstrate that the Black Sash soon came to understand that to be effective, their activities had to include collaboration with African women. As members’ attitudes shifted toward a more inclusive political franchise so did their attitudes regarding inclusive membership in a women’s political organization.

The various reasons articulated by historians to explain why the Black Sash limited membership to white women before 1963 were likely important to individual members. Noel Robb, a founder member of the Cape Western Region who became the manager of the Athlone Advice Office in Cape Town, recalled that she was against making political statements when the matter was raised at the conference in Johannesburg in September 1955. She feared then that such statements would cause “the Coloured people to join us.” With the benefit of hindsight she observed, “Years later, we would have given anything to have them do so.”³⁹⁸ Mrs. Sinclair’s explanation that “there would have been no League” if membership was open to all women on a non-racial basis in 1956, reflects the likely consensus of the leadership. As the minutes of the Bloemfontein National Conference show, the Black Sash was struggling to maintain membership by April 1956 in the face of increasing opposition by the white male leaders of the National and United Parties. While the decision was, as Jean Sinclair described it, “a moral lapse,”

³⁹⁷ Spink, *Black Sash*, 58. Helen Scanlon does not discuss the decision to limit membership specifically but she implies that the exclusion of black women resulted from concerns for the “homogeneity” of the organization. Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 109-113.

³⁹⁸ Robb, *The Sash and I*, 30.

it may have enabled the organization to survive the opposition of the white political parties and the various internal controversies which plagued the Black Sash during the 1950's. By adopting a notion of political morality which embraced principles of equality before the law, representative parliamentary democracy and defense of fundamental individual liberties, the early leaders of the Black Sash set the organization on a course which would ultimately lead to open membership and, more importantly, support for a non-racial universal franchise. How far the women were willing to carry their protest against the various policies of apartheid in 1956, however, was tested in a conflict with the Johannesburg City Council just two months after the Bloemfontein National Conference. As the Nationalist government increased implementation of influx control through the Group Areas Act, the residence requirements of the NLAA and increased the pressure on African women to accept passes during 1957 and 1958, the Black Sash was forced to confront the racial injustices by which white privilege was maintained or risk compromising the principles of political morality.

4. “This might mean the loss of many members”: Applying an Agenda of Political Morality, 1956-1957

From 1956 – 1958 the Black Sash struggled to define their agenda and realize their goal of instituting political morality in the established politics of the white state. Mass protests and government crackdowns between 1956 and 1958 confronted the leaders of the Black Sash with many issues as they scrutinized the impact of apartheid legislation under the lens of political morality. As the leadership debated how far the Sash should go to implement their agenda, many questions arose. Should they protest against specific unjust laws or “injustice” generally? Should they focus exclusively on educating the white electorate about the immorality of apartheid or continue to confront the government by protesting the oppressive laws of apartheid? Was it possible to strike a balance between education and opposition? These questions came to the fore in June and July 1956. On 25 June, barely two months after the debate over the meaning of political morality at the Bloemfontein National Conference, the Black Sash Central Executive learned that the Johannesburg City Council intended to impose a municipal ordinance banning meetings of more than 10 Africans in the townships around

Johannesburg.³⁹⁹ Since the majority of Johannesburg City Councilors belonged to the United Party, Mrs. Foley contacted Mr. Hymie Miller, leader of the UP caucus. He referred her to Dr. Boris Wilson, another UP City Councillor who was Chairman of the municipal Non-European Affairs Committee.⁴⁰⁰ After Dr. Wilson refused to see her, Mrs. Foley and other members of the Sash Central Executive decided to attend a meeting of the Johannesburg City Council to observe the debate and discover whether the ordinance would pass. Leaving their sashes at home, they attended the meeting as private citizens. They were appalled when the ordinance passed without significant debate and all UP city councilors voted in favour of it.⁴⁰¹ The next day, a multi-racial meeting organized by the Liberal Party resolved to send a delegation of 35 prominent white Johannesburg citizens representing groups who opposed the ordinance to meet with the UP caucus and “discuss

³⁹⁹ The Johannesburg City Council maintained that the ordinance was merely intended to control traffic in the townships. According to a magistrate ruling in 1955, the Johannesburg city traffic laws did not apply to the townships and the City Council maintained that the ordinance was intended to rectify this problem. No less than four legal opinions concluded that the traffic by-laws and the new ordinance were separate issues. The Black Sash, Circular No. 7, (12 July 1956), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1. The minutes of meetings regarding the Johannesburg Municipal Ordinance do not reflect that the ordinance was imposed as a response to any specific action by Africans. However, there were ongoing protests over a number of issues including the Sophiatown removals under the Group Areas Act, protests by the ANCWL and FSAW over passes for women, and meetings to promote the upcoming women’s march to Pretoria on 9 August. Walker notes that in 1956 the FSAW “launched immediately upon an extensive campaign of conferences, meetings, demonstrations and local protests as soon as it was announced that passes would be introduced for women.” Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 190. A pamphlet created by the Transvaal Region FSAW to announce a meeting over passes in March 1956 struck a militant tone. It declared, “Women do NOT want Pass Laws. We are not prepared to submit to the humiliations and sufferings that Pass Laws bring.” Quoted in Walker, 191. See also, Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, 108, 143-144.

⁴⁰⁰ Mrs. Foley also contacted Mrs. K. Mitchell, a member of the Black Sash who was also UP Johannesburg City Councillor. The Black Sash, Circular No.7 (12 July 1956), 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴⁰¹ Only three councilors, Dick Harvey, Jack Cotton and Jack Lewson, husband of historian and Black Sash member Phyllis Lewson, voted against the ordinance. All three were “Independent Councilors.” Ibid.

with them the possibilities of having the regulations withdrawn.”⁴⁰² Mrs. Driver reported that the attendees at the meeting “[were] anxious that the Black Sash be officially represented on the delegation.”⁴⁰³ The Johannesburg Regional Council authorized the Regional Chairman, Mrs. Barker, accompanied by Mrs. Marias and Mrs. Clemo to join the delegation as representatives of the Black Sash.⁴⁰⁴ The Central Executive authorized them to inform the UP caucus that the ordinance was “very definitely against our principles ...many warnings had been given that if any political party or governing body deliberately takes away the rights of any section of the people of South Africa, they would be liable to be ‘Black Sashed.’”⁴⁰⁵ When the UP caucus refused to reconsider their support for the municipal ordinance, an emergency meeting of the Black Sash Central Executive voted unanimously to issue a press release on 5 July announcing that the Black Sash would protest.

The stunning press release was forcefully worded. It began, “The Black Sash covenants to fight the new municipal regulations that ban meetings of more than 10 Africans in locations... the regulations are a deprivation of liberty and the right of free assembly.” Careful to minimize any implication of bad faith by UP City Councilors, the statement continued, “We are certain that the full implications of these regulations ...were not understood by the councilors who voted for them...”⁴⁰⁶ But the statement

⁴⁰² The minutes of the meeting do not reflect the names of any of the other citizens. But Mrs. Driver reported that the group was to include church leaders, members of the Liberal Party and local businessmen. Three of the delegates represented the Black Sash. Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ The Black Sash, Minutes of the Committee Meeting on 2 July, 1956, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF2552 reel 1.

⁴⁰⁵ Black Sash Circular no. 7, 3, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴⁰⁶ Black Sash Circular no. 7, 3, Black Sash Society Papers.

underscored the women's independence from party politics and urged "all fair minded citizens" to join them in their protest. Characterizing the ordinance as "dictatorial" and emphasizing the primacy of political morality even in municipal government, the statement concluded, "We have been asked why we are doing this...we exist to fight for the protection of civil rights and liberties of all sections of the people. These regulations...remove one of the civil rights of the men and women in the townships."⁴⁰⁷ On 6 July, the City Council capitulated; announcing that the ordinance would be suspended.⁴⁰⁸

The confrontation with the UP over the Johannesburg City Ordinance was a critical step in the evolution of the Black Sash because it provided an opportunity for members to examine how far they were willing to go to promote their notion of political morality. Opposing the UP over the rights of Africans when the majority of Black Sash members either belonged to the UP or had close ties to the UP, illustrated that the Black Sash was willing to risk its own viability rather than compromise a principle of political morality. However, their victory exponentially increased the antagonism between the Black Sash and the UP. As various regions reported to the National Council Meeting during 23-25 July, members were under sustained pressure from their husbands and the UP to resign from the Black Sash. The debate between the delegates to the National Council meeting during July 23-25, 1956 revealed the gendered nature of the struggle the

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ The Black Sash responded with another press release the following day, stating, "We welcome the announcement by Dr. B. Wilson ...that the regulations have been suspended... We regret however that such an important measure should have been summarily passed...despite the fact that attention was previously drawn to its implications and effects." Circular no. 7, 4, Black Sash Society Papers.

Black Sash waged against apartheid as well as the widening rifts among the regions over policy.

“We must decide how far we can act in implementing policy.”

Mrs. Foley opened the meeting by summarizing the conflict with the city council.⁴⁰⁹ Then she told the delegates, “The issue is not what was done on this occasion, but we must decide how far we can act in implementing policy.”⁴¹⁰ Mrs. Dora Hill of the Central Executive, who had demonstrated her ability to mediate between competing views during the debate over the meaning of political morality at Bloemfontein, was cautious. She told the group, “A new step altogether was contemplated, that of ‘Black Sashing’ the United Party ... [It] was such a new thing that it was correct to consider the reaction of the regions.”⁴¹¹ Mrs. Hendersen said that she “had been asked to convey ... a resolution passed unanimously [by the Cape Western Region] congratulating the Central Executive on the action they had taken.”⁴¹² Mrs. Corrigan of Natal Midlands said, “... [we can] make no compromise on principle. We might lose members, but it was less important to lose that type of member than to compromise. If there was an infringement, we must ‘black sash’.”⁴¹³ Mrs. Owens of Kimberly and Mrs. Ollemans of the Orange Free State disagreed. While they concurred with the principle that there should be no compromise with unjust laws, they thought it was a mistake to demonstrate against the

⁴⁰⁹ Circular no. 7 was previously distributed to regional and branch chairs with directions to discuss the controversy at branch meetings and ascertain the attitudes of the members before the National Council meeting. Circular no. 7, 4, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴¹⁰ The Black Sash, Secretary’s Notes of National Council Meeting on 23-25 July 1956, 16, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

United Party. As Mrs. Ollemans contended, “at this stage we could not afford to antagonize our supporters. In the Free State [we have] lost members because they were afraid that they might be disloyal to their United Party... they were uncertain which way the Black Sash were going.”⁴¹⁴ Mrs. Pirie of Cape Eastern reported that amazingly, Port Elizabeth members were in “complete accord with the action taken by Johannesburg and the Central Executive.” Mrs. Pirie thought the threatened protest against the Johannesburg City Council proved that the Black Sash were “non-party political” and were “standing on a moral issue.” Mrs. Pirie added, “and once you stood on a moral issue, you could not back down.”⁴¹⁵ Nevertheless, Mrs. Pirie wanted clarification. “Who was to be ‘black sashed’ and to what action was this to be taken,” she asked.⁴¹⁶ Mrs. Tracy of Lowveld agreed with Mrs. Pirie, but also agreed with Mrs. Ollemans, “...this might mean a loss of many members,” she cautioned.⁴¹⁷ After continued discussion, the delegates unanimously passed a resolution which accepted the principle that all political parties might be “black sashed.”⁴¹⁸ The resolution was in accord with the earlier attitude expressed by Mrs. Foley and others at the Bloemfontein National Conference that there is one standard of political morality applicable to all.

Reports from the regions later that same day illustrated how much their refusal to compromise their principles might cost the Black Sash. Delegates from many regions reported dramatic losses in membership, confirmed intimidation by employers and

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

corroborated rumors that the UP wanted the Black Sash to disband.⁴¹⁹ The subsequent discussion among the delegates attests to their determination to persist with their new agenda despite resistance both at home and in the wider white community as long as the men failed to provide principled moral leadership. Delegates from the Border Region provided examples of intimidation by employers to pressure husbands not to allow their wives to take part in “anti-government activities.”⁴²⁰ One man was told that he must not “play the piano at a Black Sash *braaivleis*... the wife of a bank manager cannot stand as it would affect her husband’s future... a Bank Inspector’s wife cannot take the magazine because her post had to be forwarded through the head office and she dared not risk it being seen.”⁴²¹ Cape Midlands reported similar difficulties. Mrs. Southey said that they “were having great difficulty with the husbands and a great deal of resistance from them. This made it difficult for the wives...”⁴²² Mrs. Tracy suggested that the Black Sash bring public pressure to bear by identifying firms which used the husband’s employment to stifle political activity by his wife.⁴²³ Mrs. Ollemans of the Free State heartily agreed with Mrs. Tracey’s suggestion. She noted that the women had been blamed for their timidity

⁴¹⁹ Region reports showed that members with paid up dues numbered less than 3,000. The Black Sash, Secretary’s Notes on Regional Reports to National Council Meeting (23-25 July 1956), 50-60, Black Sash Society Papers CAMP Collection: MF 2552, reel 1.

⁴²⁰ Secretary’s Notes on Regional Reports, 50. Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴²¹ Worst of all, Border delegates reported, “The husband of one of our keen members was recently chosen as chairman of the United Party Branch. He was immediately instructed by his Johannesburg directors that he must resign or refrain from taking part in party politics.” Ibid. A *braaivleis* is akin to a barbeque.

⁴²² Secretary’s Notes of National Council Meeting, 69. The Black Sash recognized the existence of a “silent sisterhood” of women who could not publicly demonstrate but who supported the aims of the Black Sash by creating crafts to be sold at fundraising events, donating money and attending meetings. The Black Sash, Minutes of a Conference on 11 & 12 September, 1955, 4, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴²³ Secretary’s Notes of National Council Meeting (23-25 July 1956), 67, Black Sash Society Papers.

when it was the firms that were the “root of the trouble.”⁴²⁴ Mrs. Hill noted that “...they [the men] would probably be strengthened in their feeble resolve by this.”⁴²⁵

The delegates then turned to discuss the increasing opposition to the Black Sash by the UP. Mrs. Ollemans reported that “no progress can be reported in the movement.” Most members of the Black Sash in the Orange Free State were members of the UP and they feared that they “were being disloyal to the United Party by taking part in Black Sash activities.”⁴²⁶ Mrs. Pirie reported that the Leader of the UP in the Cape had contacted the men in Bedford and asked them “not to let their wives join the Black Sash.”⁴²⁷ Mrs. Hendersen of Cape Western pointed out that the leader of the United Party, Sir de Villiers Graaff, “realized that we would become a danger to and in possible conflict with the United Party principles—as we have—and as a result, he has never supported the Black Sash.”⁴²⁸ Mrs. Fourie of the Southern Transvaal Region reported that members of the UP were “going around stating that we [the UP] would lose the election because of the Black Sash.”⁴²⁹

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid. Subsequent minutes and correspondence of the Johannesburg and Cape Western Regions as well as minutes of National Council meetings and conferences do not indicate whether any firm was ever named in a public meeting as engaging in intimidation tactics against employees. It is possible the women decided not to jeopardize their husband’s employment by publicly admonishing his employer. It is also possible that subsequent controversies over the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the NLAA overshadowed members’ concerns about intimidation by employers. Since the documents of the Black Sash could be accessed by security police, it is also possible that the women decided not to retain a record of their specific concerns about intimidation.

⁴²⁶ Secretary’s Notes on Regional Reports at National Council Meeting 23-25 July 1956, 55, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴²⁷ Secretary’s Notes, on Regional Reports at National Council Meeting 23-25 July 1956, 66. Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴²⁸ Secretary’s Notes, 69, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴²⁹ Secretary’s Notes, 70, Black Sash Society Papers.

The discussion also addressed the issue of whether or not to continue vigils against the Senate Act. For many of the leaders this was a question of focus. Mrs. Power of the Cape Western Region said that the Black Sash were no longer getting much publicity because they were not protesting against anything specific. Mrs. Foley and other regional delegates wanted to continue vigils in Cape Town and Pretoria over the Senate Act and the hauntings of NP ministers. They thought that the Black Sash should address issues which separated the white races first and concentrate on educating white voters.⁴³⁰ But other delegates feared “over-stressing the educational side.”⁴³¹ Mrs. Green of the Central Executive crystallized these concerns arguing, “So many organizations were there just for ...educating their members. [We] had become popular because of the striking visual sign...We will die if we become a purely educational organ,” she cautioned. “We must have something vivid.”⁴³²

These discussions over policy reveal one of the major tensions among the regions of the Black Sash: whether to focus on educating the white electorate or opposing unjust laws. The leadership soon learned that they must educate their own members in order to effectively oppose the injustices of apartheid. No matter how liberal the leaders were, the Black Sash was still an organization of white women in a white state.

⁴³⁰ Secretary's Notes, 27, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴³¹ Secretary's Notes, 62, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴³² Secretary's Notes, 67, Black Sash Society Papers.

“Splendid idealism but entirely lacking in realism”: The Black Sash and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Ironically, although the Black Sash was willing to publicly oppose white political parties they were not yet willing to associate with the multi-racial FSAW. On 9 August, 1956, some twenty thousand women, most of them African, marched on Pretoria in opposition to passes. Individual members of the Black Sash participated in the women’s march or engaged in local demonstrations supporting the march.⁴³³ According to Helen Joseph, Secretary of the FSAW in 1956, the Black Sash was invited to join the FSAW and to participate officially in the women’s march but they declined based upon their non-affiliation provision.⁴³⁴ Cheryl Walker suggests that the Black Sash “looked askance at the Congress Alliance as a radical and potentially subversive organization.”⁴³⁵ This characterization tends to oversimplify the attitude of the leaders of the Black Sash. Both Cape Western and the Southern Transvaal Regions of the Black Sash had contacts with the FSAW and the ANC in 1956 which they expanded and strengthened between 1957 and 1959.⁴³⁶ For example, the Southern Transvaal Region sent three observers to the FSAW Conference on 23 June 1957 and Mrs. Marias reported that she had been “very

⁴³³ Noel Robb reminisced about the Women’s March to her friend Jessie Power, “You may remember this historic event. We celebrated quite a women’s movement at a get together in Rylands—over 400—mostly black. We did an excellent and relevant play and the Black Sash served tea, coffee and biscuits and all.” Black Sash Archival Collection, Noel Robb Papers: BC 1092.C.9. University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department. An undated letter from Helen Joseph to the Black Sash Secretary inviting the Black Sash to send delegates to the FSAW national Congress in December 1956 stated, “we recall with pleasure that individual members of the Black Sash accompanied women to Pretoria on August 9th.” FSAW to the Black Sash (n.d.), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF2552 reel 5.

⁴³⁴ Ibid; Joseph, *Tomorrow’s Sun*, 72.

⁴³⁵ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 174.

⁴³⁶ In early 1957, the Johannesburg and Southern Transvaal Regions merged due to the decrease in membership in both regions. Minutes of the Southern Transvaal Regional Meeting, 17 April 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

impressed as the accent of the [FSAW] meeting had been on cooperation between the races.”⁴³⁷ The archival evidence suggests that reluctance by the leaders of the Black Sash to be closely associated with the FSAW was based, in part, on their reluctance to associate with the white COD as they believed that members of the COD were Communists who were attempting to radicalize the ANC.⁴³⁸ However, the leaders of the FSAW also supported a universal, non-racial franchise while the leaders of the Black Sash remained divided over the franchise issue as we shall see. Moreover, in 1956 the Black Sash did not yet maintain sustained cooperation in alliances across racial divides.

Divisions over the franchise and the focus of the Black Sash agenda erupted again in a controversy over the suggestion by the Cape Western Region during the National Council Meeting in November 1956, that the Black Sash adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a basis for Black Sash policy.⁴³⁹ The Lowveld and Natal Midlands regions objected to the UDHR because “...it is unreasonable to expect South

⁴³⁷ The Black Sash, Minutes of the Johannesburg Committee Meeting, 19 June 1957 and 3 July 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3. Mrs. Foley accepted an invitation from the Transvaal Branch of the South African Indian Congress to speak at a meeting against removals in Sophiatown where she was “enthusiastically received.” The Black Sash, Minutes of Central Executive, 4 September 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3.

⁴³⁸ As will be discussed in the next chapter, Molly Peterson told Jean Sinclair that no cooperative effort to establish a bail fund or oppose passes for women would be successful without the ANCWL. The problem, in Mrs. Peterson’s opinion based on her experience in C.A.T.A.P.A.W., was that many of the leaders of the FSAW were also members of the COD who questioned the sincerity of Black Sash opposition to passes and portrayed the Black Sash in a “wrong light” with women in the ANCWL. Molly Peterson to Jean Sinclair, 21 November 1958, Black Sash Society Papers CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4. As will be discussed in chapter 5, Mrs. Foley’s primary objection to serving on the Bishop’s Committee was associating with the COD.

⁴³⁹ Cape Western Black Sash News Sheet (November 1956), 2, Black Sash Archival Collection, Cape Western Region Archives: BC 668.D.2, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department. The leaders of the Central Executive agreed that adopting the UDHR “might go a long way toward solving our problems with policy.” The Black Sash, Minutes of Central Executive Meeting, 28 November, 1956, 3, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3.

Africans to accept the principles of racial intermarriage and of universal suffrage.”⁴⁴⁰ Mrs. Tracy speaking for the Lowveld Region suggested that “while the Cape Western’s proposal shows splendid idealism, it is entirely lacking in realism.” She maintained that the goal of the Black Sash should include getting rid of the present government and the Black Sash was venturing too far afield from that objective.⁴⁴¹ Mrs. Tracy concluded dramatically, “...the Black Sash will certainly not achieve its objects by committing hari kari!”⁴⁴² Mrs. Corrigall’s letter contained similar sentiments. She did not see why the Black Sash needed a framework for political morality and thought the Black Sash was moving too far away from their objective of educating the public. She asked, “Can we not just stick to this job?”⁴⁴³ The Cape Western Region did not suffer these rebuffs in silence, however. They agreed to withdraw their suggestion to adopt the UDHR if it would cause disruption in the Black Sash. But they wished to point out that their suggestion should not be considered as “...unrealistic or foolishly idealistic, when this Declaration has been adopted by all countries with the exception of the Soviet Union and her satellites, Saudi Arabia and the Union of South Africa.”⁴⁴⁴ To keep the peace, the Central Executive decided to send a copy of all three letters, a copy of the UDHR and its preamble, and a

⁴⁴⁰ Lowveld Region to Black Sash Central Executive, 24 November 1956, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4.

⁴⁴¹ As we shall see, these arguments would soon resurface as the rationale for a scheme orchestrated by the UP to force the Black Sash to disband before the 1958 parliamentary elections.

⁴⁴² Lowveld Region to Black Sash Central Executive, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴⁴³ Mrs. Corrigall to Black Sash Central Executive, 5 January 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4.

⁴⁴⁴ Cape Western Region to Black Sash Central Executive, Annexure F to Circular 31, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 5.

copy of an article on a proposed multi-racial franchise by Sir Arthur Bryant to each region, “for information and discussion.”⁴⁴⁵

“Fighting with Shadows” Internal Conflict Over the Native Laws Amendment Act

Almost immediately, another more serious controversy arose over how the Black Sash should respond to the “Church Clause” of the 1957 amendments to the Native Laws Amendment Act (NLAA). Clause 29 (c) of the NLAA, also known as “the Church Clause” prohibited a “Native” from attending “any church, school, hospital, club or other institution or place of entertainment ...established after January 1938,” without first obtaining permission from the Minister of Native Affairs if the meeting was to be conducted in an urban area, “outside a location, Native village or hostel.”⁴⁴⁶ The Minister had authority to impose “such conditions as he sees fit and no one was permitted to enter “a Native location, village or hostel without the permission of its superintendent.”⁴⁴⁷ Disagreement within the Black Sash over how to respond to the “Church Clause” occurred at the same time that the UP was increasing pressure on the Black Sash to go into recess in anticipation of the 1958 Parliamentary Elections. The conflict over how to respond to the “Church Clause” coupled with the pressure from the UP to force the Black

⁴⁴⁵ Circular 31, Black Sash Society Papers. The article by Sir Arthur Bryant outlined the proposal by the Capricorn Africa Society under which elite urban Africans and Chiefs and Headmen (but not women) would be granted limited franchise rights as the basis for a new multi-racial franchise in South Africa. The Capricorn Africa Society was based in what was then Rhodesia and was a multi-racial association of men who sought to avoid the extremes of African Nationalism through a steady but gradual move toward a qualified non-racial franchise. Alan Paton was associated with the Capricorn Africa Society. See, Bizeck Jube Phiri, “The Capricorn Africa Society Revisited: The Impact of Liberalism in Zambia’s Colonial History, 1949-1963,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24, no. 1 (1991): 76.

⁴⁴⁶ South African Institute of Race Relations, “Comment on Clauses Restricting the Right of Free Association and Assembly,” March, 1957, 1, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁴⁴⁷ The SAIRR claimed that the Church clause “will mean the cessation of European-African contact and consultation on a voluntary basis.” Ibid.

Sash into recess almost destroyed the Black Sash. The ensuing schism revealed additional complexities of implementing their agenda to promote political morality. Black Sash leaders were forced to confront difficult questions: Should the Black Sash obey the proscriptions of a law which violated their principles? Should the Black Sash subordinate their principles of individual liberty and equality before the law to the UP agenda to throw the NP out of office?

Cherry Michelman portrays the schism as a conflict between the rank and file members who felt their concerns were not represented at National Conferences and a leadership whose liberal agenda was too idealistic.⁴⁴⁸ Helen Scanlon opines that after their protest against the Senate Act failed “many women lost interest in the Black Sash.”⁴⁴⁹ However, the internal conflicts among the membership of the Black Sash during this period were much more complex than either of these authors suggest. The conflict over the NLAA tested the limits of the resolve among members of the Black Sash to promote individual liberty and equality before the law for all segments of the population when faced with a drastic loss in membership. The conflict also tested the women’s commitment to maintaining a moral voice in public political discourse independent of male dominated white political parties.

⁴⁴⁸ Michelman, *The Black Sash*, 73-76. Michelman does not mention that the dispute came to a head over the NLAA.

⁴⁴⁹ Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 107. Scanlon does not examine the internal tensions and diverse perspectives among the branches regarding how to influence the white electorate which contributed to the loss of members between 1956 and 1958. Her methodology of presenting portraits of individual women’s lives in the Western Cape was not intended to encompass a thorough review of the internal controversies among the Black Sash nationally. However, Eulalie Stott and Noel Robb whose lives Scanlon highlighted as representative of liberal white women in the Western Cape Black Sash were at the center of the controversy over the NLAA. Her portrait of these women would have been more complex and complete had she included this controversy in her discussion. Spink also discusses the schism but like Michelman and Scanlon does not place the schism in the context of the NLAA. See Spink, *Black Sash*, 59-60.

On 29 April, 1957 Mrs. Foley, Mrs. Green and Mrs. Fouche met with Mr. Harry Oppenheimer and Sir de Villiers Graaf, leader of the UP, who urged them to take the Black Sash into recess before the 1958 Parliamentary Elections. Sir de Villiers Graaf told them that the Black Sash should have closed while the Senate Act was on appeal. Revealing his vision of the proper and subordinate role of women engaged in political activity, he opined that Black Sash demonstrations were taking up time that “could be more usefully spent on direct political work such as, for example, checking the voter’s roll.”⁴⁵⁰ He denied that the UP wanted the Black Sash to disband and contended that statements by other UP leaders, including Dr. Jan Steytler, about “destroying” particular Black Sash branches reflected individual sentiments rather than UP policy. Sir de Villiers Graaf blamed the Black Sash for the animosity of Dr. Steytler and other UP leaders. He insisted that their animosity was ignited by Black Sash haunts which embarrassed UP leaders in front of their constituents.⁴⁵¹ Reporting on the meeting, Mrs. Green expressed her opinion that the “whole effect of the interview was shadow-boxing.”⁴⁵²

A few days later, on 4 May 1957, the Cape Western Black Sash joined the SAIRR, the multi-racial Civil Rights League and various churches at an all day conference in Cape Town to “see what could be done to prevent the Native Laws

⁴⁵⁰ The Black Sash, Report of Meeting Between Leaders of the United Party and the Black Sash on 29 April 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid. It is more likely that the Black Sash haunts were embarrassing to UP leaders because they reflected white women’s resistance to patriarchy and demonstrated that the women of the Black Sash were more militant and more effective than male leaders of the UP in opposing the Senate Act and the Separate Representation of Voters Act.

⁴⁵² The Black Sash, Report of Meeting Between Leaders of the United Party and the Black Sash on 29 April 1957, 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

Amendment Bill from being implemented.⁴⁵³ All regions of the Black Sash opposed the “Church Clause” as a deprivation of freedom of worship and assembly, but the Cape Western Region was directly affected because their public meetings were inter-racial.⁴⁵⁴ Various churches around the country vowed to disobey the law if it was not changed and the Black Sash issued a pamphlet which condemned the NLAA as “Tyranny.”⁴⁵⁵ Another pamphlet not only condemned the “Church Clause” but also condemned the residence restrictions which the NLAA imposed on Africans.⁴⁵⁶ Directed at the white community the pamphlet asked rhetorically, “Would you, the white citizen, like to be in the position of [Africans] today? Unable to leave the town of your birth, liable to be deported at the whim of a minor official, unable to worship where you wish without...permission of the Minister of Native Affairs?”⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵³ Cape Western Black Sash News Letter No. 4 (May 1957), 2. Black Sash Archival Collection, Cape Western Region Archive: BC 668.D.2, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department.

⁴⁵⁴ The Black Sash, “Memorandum from Cape Western on Native Laws Amendment Act,” April 1957. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3. The Cape Western Region was involved in a multi-racial campaign against the Group Areas Act; a multi-racial conference organized by the Archbishop of Cape Town and C.A.T.A.P.A.W. Cape Western News Sheet no.1 and no. 2, Cape Western Region Archive.

⁴⁵⁵ The Black Sash, “The Native Laws Amendment Bill of 1957,” (March 1957), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF2552 reel 1.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ The Black Sash, Pamphlet 9, “The Black Sash Opposes Tyranny,” (18 March, 1957), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552, reel 1. Pamphlet No. 16, a shorter pamphlet was also used. See Figure 2.

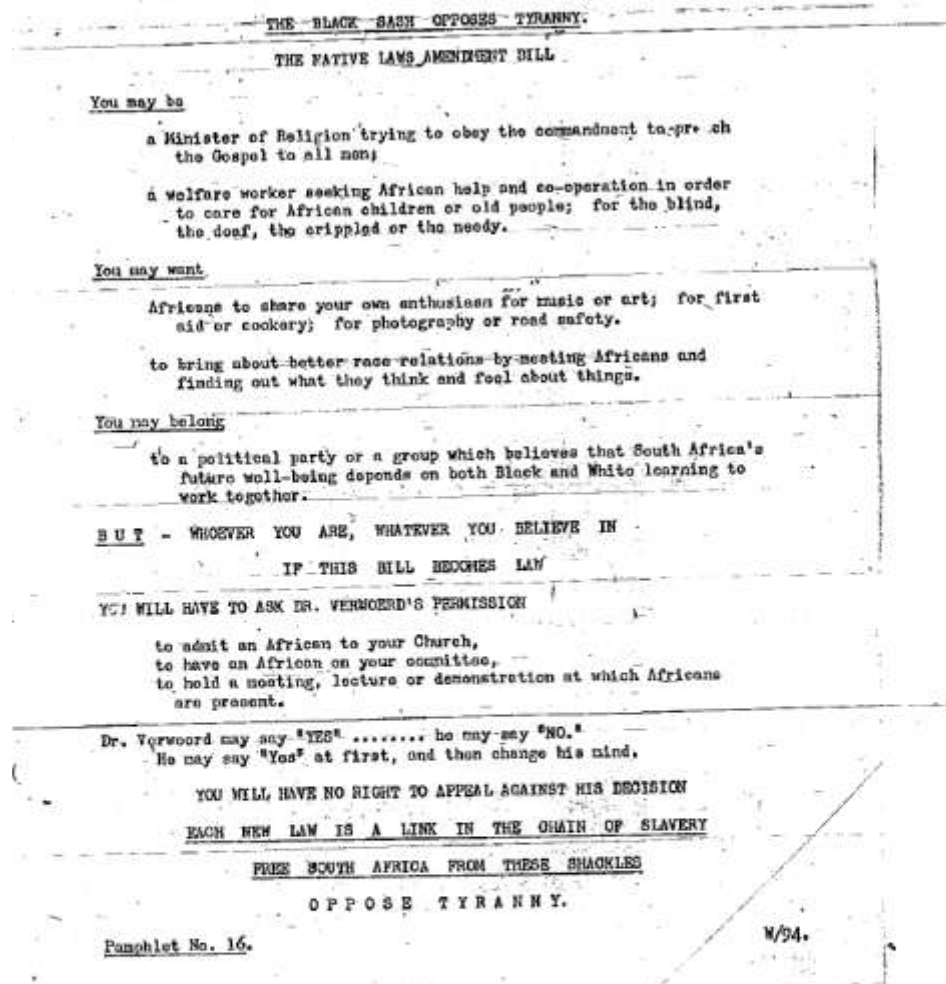


Figure 2. Pamphlet No. 16 Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1

At the Black Sash National Conference in Pietermaritzburg during 23-25 May, 1957, the Cape Western Region proposed a resolution to permit the region to disregard the "Church Clause" by continuing to hold public inter-racial meetings. The resolution provided, "In those instances where the Black Sash finds its work is affected or its principles outraged by the Native Laws Amendment Act, it may feel itself morally bound to disregard the prohibition made under the Act, but that legal opinion shall be sought.

Any decision should be postponed until after legal advice has been obtained.”⁴⁵⁸ The resolution passed by a vote of 27 For; 15 Against; 16 Abstentions. Resolutions proposed by UP supporters in the Black Sash did not pass, however. The resolution that the Black Sash go into recess until after the 1958 Parliamentary Elections failed by a wide margin. The resolution that members be “urged to work as individuals for the downfall of the present government and that [the Black Sash] should stress the educational side of the organization,” was adopted as a “recommendation” only.⁴⁵⁹

Every region was unsure about the implications of the resolution supporting Cape Western’s defiance of the NLAA. They worried that the credibility of the Black Sash among whites would be damaged and there was considerable disagreement about the usefulness of civil disobedience. The debate over the resolution revolved around whether civil disobedience demonstrated a principled moral voice of opposition or whether civil disobedience by white citizens incited Africans to greater militancy.⁴⁶⁰ No doubt, the knowledge that 156 prominent people from all races in the Congress Alliance had been arrested and charged with treason at the end of 1956 added to members’ uncertainty about the efficacy of civil disobedience.⁴⁶¹ The view that civil disobedience constituted “incitement,” was steeped in paternalism and reflected the ignorance among many members regarding the results of apartheid policies and the personal indignities to which people had been subjected. They did not yet realize that the radical militancy of African

⁴⁵⁸ The Black Sash, Minutes of National Conference at Pietermaritzburg (22-24 May 1957), 27, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴⁵⁹ The Black Sash, Minutes of the National Conference at Pietermaritzburg (22-24 May 1957), 69, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴⁶⁰ Minutes of National Conference at Pietermaritzburg (22-24 May 1957), 27-35, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴⁶¹ See, Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, 77

opposition was incited by the economic and social injustices of apartheid rather than civil disobedience by whites. Members' concerns over the resolution and the issue of civil disobedience were manipulated by Mrs. Catherine Taylor, a member of the Constantia Branch of the Black Sash as part of a strategy by the UP, orchestrated with the permission of Sir de Villiers Graaf to force the Black Sash to go into recess before the 1958 parliamentary elections.⁴⁶² Mrs. Taylor's arguments were directed at branches in the Cape Western Region but similar arguments were repeated by UP members in Black Sash meetings around the country.

Mrs. Taylor's criticisms of the Black Sash leadership reflected patriarchal attitudes about women's political activity and were couched in terms of respectability and political expediency. In a letter on 24 June on behalf of the Constantia branch, Mrs. Taylor complained that the leadership had diverged from the original goal of opposing the present government. She bemoaned the fact that the Black Sash did not disband following passage of the Senate Act while it was still at the height of its popularity. She suggested that the Sash was now losing all support because it had become a "non-positive movement."⁴⁶³ Mrs. Taylor complained that branches must now oppose every form of "administrative immorality and discrimination in every branch of government—from Parliament to Provincial Councils, City Councils, down to school boards, totally

⁴⁶² Mrs. Taylor told members of the UP and the Black Sash that she had consulted with Sir de Villiers Graaf in drafting the statement and he was in agreement. "Statement to the Cape Peninsula and Western Province Women's Council of the United Party, Made by the Chairman, Mrs. Catherine Taylor, M.P.C. on Friday, September 6, 1957," 3, Black Sash Society Papers CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 5. Noel Robb recollected that Sir de Villiers Graaf met with her husband Frank and tried to persuade him "to make me change my mind" about remaining in the Black Sash. Robb, *The Sash and I*, 38.

⁴⁶³ Constantia Branch to the Black Sash Regional Council, 24 June, 1957, Black Sash Society Papers CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4.

disregarding whether these bodies were government controlled.”⁴⁶⁴ Mrs. Taylor suggested that “...without conscious thought on the part of the rank and file...we are losing ourselves in the clouds of idealism, instead of keeping our feet firmly on the ground.”⁴⁶⁵ The leadership, Mrs. Taylor said, were occupying themselves “with abstract ideals...whilst the important collective struggle of immediate urgency is to [sic] PUT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT OUT OF POWER.”⁴⁶⁶ Reflecting patriarchal attitudes about the role of women in the public political arena, Mrs. Taylor characterized branch members as “housewives, unused to politics and public speaking. Diffident to the point of not even attending meetings because although we are dissatisfied with the new trend in the Black Sash, we feel unable to put across our own individual opinions in the face of your superior ability.”⁴⁶⁷ Speaking for the Constantia Branch, she requested a special regional meeting to consider two resolutions, both of which were aimed at forcing the Black Sash into recess until after the 1958 parliamentary elections.⁴⁶⁸

On 10 July, unaware of Mrs. Taylor’s complaints, the Central Executive refused to ratify the NLAA resolution adopted at the National Conference at Pietermaritzburg on the advice of legal counsel who feared that the leaders might be personally subject to criminal liability if Cape Western broke the law.⁴⁶⁹ On 22 July, Cape Western submitted a memorandum to the Central Executive which argued that the Black Sash must stand on

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid. This concern was clearly related to the recent dust-up between the Black Sash and the Johannesburg City Council.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid. Mrs. Taylor was a member of the Cape Provincial Council and Chairman of the UP Women’s Council for the Cape Peninsula. She could hardly be characterized as a diffident housewife.

⁴⁶⁸ Constantia Branch to Black Sash Regional Council, 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴⁶⁹ The Black Sash, “Minutes of 10th Meeting of the Central Executive, 26 July 1957,” Black Sash Society Papers, Camp Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

its principles or lose all credibility in Cape Town. If all the affected groups in Cape Town resolved to continue multi-racial public meetings, Cape Western contended, the Minister of the Interior would be less likely to arrest any one of them. Finally they argued that all regions of the Black Sash “[are] affected by the NLAA and should take a united stand against it.”⁴⁷⁰ Cape Western concluded their memorandum with a rhetorical question, “If a government passes laws depriving people of their fundamental rights, which are freedom of speech, movement, religion, employment and association, does it not forfeit the right to expect obedience from the people?”⁴⁷¹

Mrs. Petersen responded to Mrs. Taylor’s letter on 31 July, reminding the Constantia Branch that decisions by the Regional Council were taken in accordance with votes by the branches following “all-branches” meetings to which every member was invited.⁴⁷² She sent a copy of both letters to every branch in the region and asked any other branches with concerns to please come forward at a special meeting on 9 September.⁴⁷³ Mrs. Petersen, Mrs. Robb, and Mrs. Stott met with Mrs. Taylor hoping to resolve her specific issues and Mrs. Petersen agreed to give Mrs. Taylor a written summary of their discussions.⁴⁷⁴ In the meantime, still unaware of the situation developing in the Western Cape, Mrs. Hill prepared a compromise resolution on the NLAA. She outlined 3 principles under which an individual or group should exercise “a

⁴⁷⁰ Memorandum from Cape Western on Native Laws Amendment Act 22 July 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4.

⁴⁷¹ Memorandum from Cape Western on Native Laws Amendment Act, 3, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴⁷² Regional Chairman’s Reply to the Letter from Constantia, 31 July, 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4.

⁴⁷³ Chairman’s Covering Letter to Constantia Correspondence, 31 July, 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552, reel 4.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

right to resist” unjust laws through civil disobedience. These principles, which guided the Black Sash for many years, are as follows:

1. That the grievance complained of is fundamental, lasting and intolerable.
2. That all constitutional means of remedying it have been exhausted.
3. If the above two conditions have been fulfilled, consideration should be given to the question as to whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the act of defiance will result in positive good in the near future; that is, that it will cause the authorities to change their minds, or that, by the popular support which the act of defiance will enlist, it will lead to a change of authorities.⁴⁷⁵

Mrs. Hill’s new resolution proposed, “If all these conditions were fulfilled, it might be proper for the leaders of an organization to break the law themselves, and by their example to invite those who agreed with them to follow suit. Further, they could not go.”⁴⁷⁶ The principles and proposed resolution were forwarded to all regions.⁴⁷⁷ On 7 August, Mrs. Taylor resigned.⁴⁷⁸ On 4 September, the Natal Coastal Region held a special regional conference to consider their response to the NLAA. Mrs. Foley told the meeting, “There were those who thought the movement should go into recess and cease activity during the pre-election period. If we did so we would never be able to resume and we should in fact be committing suicide.”⁴⁷⁹ The delegates adopted the compromise

⁴⁷⁵ The Black Sash, “N.L.A.A. Decisions Made by the Southern Transvaal Region at a Conference on September 10, 1957,” Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552, reel 4.

⁴⁷⁶ “N.L.A.A. Decisions Made by the Southern Transvaal Region at a Conference on September 10, 1957,” Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Mrs. C. Taylor to Cape Western Region, 7 August, 1957, Black Sash Society Papers. She submitted her resignation two days before the Cape Western Black Sash participated in a multi-racial protest and meeting of 200 women in Cape Town organized by C.A.T.A.P.A.W. Both the protest on 9 August and C.A.T.A.P.A.W. will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

⁴⁷⁹ The Black Sash, “Minutes of the Special Regional Conference of the Natal Coastal Region 4 September, 1957,” 1, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552, reel 2.

proposed by Mrs. Hill by unanimous vote.⁴⁸⁰ On 6 September, Mrs. Taylor invited selected members of the Black Sash who were also members of the UP to attend a meeting at which the NLAA and the upcoming election would be discussed. Mrs. Taylor used portions of Mrs. Petersen's summary of their earlier meeting to prepare the memorandum from which she spoke. Copies of the memorandum, which was highly critical of the Black Sash, were handed out and circulated throughout the UP.⁴⁸¹ Noel Robb got wind of the meeting and attended uninvited with Mrs. Petersen and Mrs. Hendersen. They rightly surmised that the purpose of the meeting was to "persuade members to leave the Black Sash because it was proposing to break the law."⁴⁸² On 9 September, the Cape Western Region held a special meeting on the resolutions prepared by the Constantia Branch. Noel Robb who described the meeting as "well attended and heated," recalled that many of her closest friends sided with Mrs. Taylor and that she was so upset that she was unable to speak at the meeting.⁴⁸³ The women decided against going into recess by a vote of 245 to 72 and the two resolutions proposed by the Constantia branch were defeated "by a fairly large majority."⁴⁸⁴ The following day, the Southern Transvaal Region also adopted Mrs. Hill's compromise unanimously, vowing not to go

⁴⁸⁰ "Minutes of the Special Regional Conference of the Natal Coastal Region," Black Sash Society Papers.

⁴⁸¹ The summary also incorporated portions from the minutes of the Orange Free State meeting regarding the NLAA. Mrs. Stoy to Black Sash Central Executive, 7 January 1958, Black Sash Society Papers CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4.

⁴⁸² Robb, *The Sash and I*, 39. Mrs. Taylor's allegation was based on Mrs. Petersen's summary of their earlier meeting with Mrs. Taylor. Mrs. Stoy to Black Sash Central Executive, 7 January, 1958.

⁴⁸³ Robb, *The Sash and I*, 38.

⁴⁸⁴ The Black Sash, Summary of Cape Western Activities Since September 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 4. The meeting lasted until after 10:00 PM, Robb, *The Sash and I*, 38. See also "Cape Western News Sheet" No. 5, 3, Black Sash Archival Collection.

into recess.⁴⁸⁵ Delegates to the Emergency National Council Meeting on September 17 emerged with a new resolution regarding the NLAA specifying “That those Regions who might be implicated in the normal course of their work will...carry on...and will do nothing provocative: should action be taken against them they would do nothing without prior consultation with all Regions ...and would abide by the majority decision.”⁴⁸⁶

The controversies over the adoption of the UDHR as a framework for political morality and the “Church Clause” of the NLAA reveal many complexities among the members of the Black Sash. The loss of members and the schism in the Black Sash was not simply the result of “over-reaching” as Michelman suggests; nor was it due simply to concerns by white women about associating with African women in the FSAW and the ANCWL as Scanlon implies. While many members accepted the principles of individual liberty such as freedom of speech, worship and assembly, the Nationalist government’s relentless implementation of the structures of apartheid tested their resolve to act on these principles especially if their activities alienated them from their political party and involved breaking the law. In the wake of the controversy, National leaders spent many days shoring up branches and reassuring members.⁴⁸⁷ Mrs. Conroy of Natal Midlands learned from a Sash husband “that we were supporting the Communists and branching

⁴⁸⁵ The Black Sash, Minutes of a Special Regional Meeting of the Southern Transvaal Region, 10, September 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁴⁸⁶ The Black Sash, “Information Bulletin to Branches September 1957.” Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection microfilm: MF 2552, reel 2.

⁴⁸⁷ The Black Sash, Natal-Midlands Regional Report, June-November 1957; Cape Midlands Report, October 1957; Cape Western Report, 1957; Orange Free State Report, October 1957, Black Sash Society Papers.

out dangerously.”⁴⁸⁸ She remarked ruefully, “Mrs. Foley will know this only too well—we are fighting with shadows.”⁴⁸⁹ The Cape Western Region lost half of its members.⁴⁹⁰ The entire Orange Free State Region resigned.⁴⁹¹ But the Black Sash emerged from the NLAA controversy as a more cohesive organization. The women who remained were not willing to compromise the principles of political morality in exchange for political expediency nor were they willing to subordinate their independent moral voice to patriarchal attitudes about women’s roles in public political discourse. Going forward, however, the leadership recognized the importance of fully educating the branches before asking them to agree to a national policy. As a result, the leadership engaged in an intensive education program regarding pass laws between 1957 and 1960 which emphasized the voices of African women. Black Sash opposition to passes was motivated by motherisms as they learned from African women the effects of pass laws on their ability to care for their children. The next chapter examines the cautious first steps of the Black Sash toward sustained inter-racial cooperation as the Black Sash began to ally with members of the ANC and the ANCWL to resist the injustices of the apartheid state. As Mrs. Hill of the Central Executive suggested, by cooperating with Africans to expose

⁴⁸⁸ Cape Midlands Report, October, 1957, Black Sash Society Papers. Mrs. Southey of Middleburg had come to the meeting intending to resign but Mrs. Conroy convinced her to remain in the Black Sash. Mrs. Conroy reported that among the “handful of supporters” at Colesburg there were “no petty fears or arguments.” (Ibid).

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ The Constantia Branch voted to go into recess until after the Parliamentary election. Robb, *The Sash and I*, 39.

⁴⁹¹ Orange Free State Report, 1957; Mrs. Watkins to Central Executive, 24 October 1957. When Mrs. O’Connor returned from overseas, the National Council reached out to her and she was able to convince a few women to return to the Black Sash. What had been the Orange Free State Region became a Country Branch of the Southern Transvaal Region. Minutes of the 27th Meeting of the Central Executive, 17 November 1957.” The Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection microfilm: MF 2552 reel 2.

“the scandal of which this country should be ashamed,” the Black Sash would educate its own members as well as the white electorate.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹² The Black Sash, Secretary’s Notes of National Council Meeting, 11 June 1959, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3.

5. “It is we who feel the cries of our children when they are hungry and sick”: Inter-racial Alliances Between the Black Sash and African Women, 1958-1959

During the 1950's as the Nationalist government continued its relentless program of social engineering under apartheid, the ANCWL and the FSAW were at the forefront of women's opposition. Although the liberal white women of the Black Sash also opposed apartheid, white and black women's relationships to the state were significantly different and this affected the militancy of their opposition. As Helen Scanlon notes in *Representation and Reality*, women's relationships to the state “...ranged from white women who were entitled to vote, did not need to work...and enjoyed the privilege of domestic help, to African women, constantly dodging the eye of officialdom, scraping a living from domestic labour [and] for whom the very notion of family was a privilege rather than a right.”⁴⁹³ Prior to 1957, Black Sash opposition to apartheid was primarily ideological, and focused on ways that unjust laws violated their notion of political morality generally. They were dedicated to promoting the principles of political morality: equality before the law; individual liberty of speech, assembly, worship and movement; and, they considered opposition to the creeping totalitarianism of apartheid to be a moral imperative. However, their sense of urgency in opposing apartheid was nowhere near as acute as the sense of urgency among African women. In 1955 and 1956, while the white women of the Black Sash mobilized as mothers to oppose the

⁴⁹³ Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 3.

constitutional chicanery of the Senate Act and raise an independent moral voice to oppose “injustice” in a general sense, African women battled racialized patriarchy to mobilize against laws which directly affected their survival and their ability to protect and provide for their children. As early as 1956, although women were not yet required by law to carry passes, the government increased pressure on rural African women to accept passes. African women responded to government pressure to carry passes with militant and coordinated acts of civil disobedience in the tradition of the 1913 Bloemfontein anti-pass campaign and the 1930 strike in Potchefstroom against Residence Permits. As in previous resistance campaigns, African women’s resistance to passes and residence permits during the 1950’s, was framed in terms of motherism.⁴⁹⁴ In April 1956 the women of Winburg in the Orange Free State collected passes which had already been issued, marched to the magistrates office and burned them, despite being cautioned by the ANC to avoid “rash action.”⁴⁹⁵ According to FSAW estimates, approximately 50,000 women participated in 38 demonstrations against passes around the country in 1956.⁴⁹⁶ By 1957 African women were being forcibly removed from their homes under the Group Areas Act and the residency provisions of the NLAA.

⁴⁹⁴ Wells, *We Now Demand*, 40, 67. Black Women’s embrace of domesticity is not an unquestioning acceptance of gender subordination as some suggest. It is related more directly to freedom from oppression. Timothy Keegan notes that following emancipation in 1838, black families also adopted domesticity as the proper role for mothers. Keegan contends that “Emancipation meant escape from the patriarchal embrace of the slaveholding unit and ...the reconciliation of families...Married women and children withdrew from the labour market....for many, this was the essence of the struggle over the meaning of freedom.” Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*, 123-124. Additionally, African women’s resistance to passes was not limited to motherisms but also reflected women’s gendered interpretation of the meaning of liberation in the broader struggle during the 1950’s. See, Gasa, “Feminisms, motherisms, patriarchies and women’s voices in the 1950’s,” in *Basus’imbokodo, bawel’imilambo/They remove boulders and cross rivers: Women in South African History*, 224-225.

⁴⁹⁵ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 192-193.

⁴⁹⁶ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 193.

However, as Scanlon observes, “the restrictions of apartheid ensured that most white women...remained separated physically as well as socially from Africans...while many progressive white women identified with black politics, they remained in a socially advantaged position.”⁴⁹⁷ As a result, according to Scanlon, radical white women in the COD and the Communist Party could employ African members of the CPSA as domestic workers in their homes, “without any sense of irony or contradiction.”⁴⁹⁸ Similarly, members of the Black Sash had limited and intermittent contact with African women activists outside the employer-employee relationship before the Cape Western Region of the Sash participated in the formation of C.A.T.A.P.A.W. in 1957. Despite the social distance between white and black women, the structures of influx control, particularly the Group Areas Act, the residence requirements of the NLAA and pass laws, offended every facet of the Black Sash notion of political morality—liberalism, Christianity and motherism. The internal Sash controversies in 1957 and the schism in early 1958 discussed in Chapter Four paved the way for the Black Sash to adopt multi-racial alliances as part of their agenda to oppose apartheid. Following the 1958 Parliamentary Elections which returned the NP to power, the Black Sash adopted a Programme of Action which envisioned a role for the Black Sash in the struggle against apartheid as a catalyst for change and signaled the women’s realization that inter-racial cooperation was essential to defeating apartheid. This chapter examines the first, sometimes hesitant steps by the Sash toward sustained collaboration with Africans. Motherisms enabled the Black Sash to empathize with the urgency of African women’s opposition to apartheid’s

⁴⁹⁷ Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 237.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

mechanisms of influx control and inter-racial Christian alliances also provided opportunity for cooperation on matters of common concern.

“The Single Most Iniquitous System Ever Imposed”: Cape Western Black Sash and C.A.T.A.P.A.W.

Beginning in 1957 when the Cape Western Region of the Black Sash joined C.A.T.A.P.A.W., the Black Sash increasingly focused on opposing the pass laws. According to the SAIRR, the registration of African women in the Western Cape began in 1954. By 1956, 2,500 African families had been endorsed out of the Cape and over 2,800 African women who were judged to be living in the Western Cape, “illegally” were ordered to leave.⁴⁹⁹ Many women and children who were endorsed out of the Cape had no place where they could legally reside.⁵⁰⁰ The legislative foundations of the Coloured Labour Preference Policy (CLPP) in the Western Cape were pass laws for women, the Group Areas Act and residence permits under the NLAA. Eulalie Stott led the Cape Western Region to join an alliance with African women against passes. Mrs. Stott invited Amy Thornton and other members of the COD to dinner to discuss the issue of passes with members of the Black Sash. After dinner, African women explained to the Sash women “how bad it is to carry a pass.”⁵⁰¹ Mrs. Stott told Nellie Jibiliza, “I don’t

⁴⁹⁹ Muriel Horrill, *A Survey of Race relations in South Africa*, (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1956/57), 71.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid. If she was married, a woman who was endorsed out of the Cape was often sent to her husband’s birthplace whether or not her husband maintained a home or had any remaining familial connections there. Children over the age of 16 also could be sent to their father’s birthplace even if their father had not been there since well before the child’s birth and they had no remaining relatives in the area. Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 44.

⁵⁰¹ Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 151.

believe you.” Mrs. Jibiliza responded, “You are right, it is difficult to believe.”⁵⁰² After this meeting, the ANCWL, the FSAW, the Cape Western Black Sash, the National Council of Women, and the Anglican Church Mother’s Union formed The Cape Association to Abolish Passes for African Women, (C.A.T.A.P.A.W.).⁵⁰³ Pass laws, the coalition maintained, and “had tragic consequences for African women, their children and their home life.”⁵⁰⁴ Passes necessitated women being forced into employment, “at the cost of their children.” Women who failed to produce their pass on demand “are subject to immediate arrest, followed after conviction, by another fine and/or imprisonment and then removed from their husbands and home.”⁵⁰⁵

To educate the white community about the injustice of passes for African women, the Cape Western Black Sash organized a series of public lectures by academics and African women spoke on “the human side from personal experience.”⁵⁰⁶ *The Black Sash* included articles by Africans describing the effects of pass laws and explaining why they opposed them.⁵⁰⁷ Illustrating the powerful influence of motherism, Noel Robb recalled a speech by an African woman “with a baby on her back” at a meeting on pass laws at St.

⁵⁰² Interview with Amy Thornton, 12 November 1998, quoted in Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 151.

⁵⁰³ The Cape Western Black Sash News Sheet, No. 5, 2, Black Sash Archival Collection. According to Helen Scanlon, the group also included the Society of Friends. Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 88.

⁵⁰⁴ “Cape Western Black Sash News Sheet” No. 5, 2.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Professor Monica Hunter Wilson Chairman of the Department of African Studies at the University of Cape Town was one of the speakers during June, 1957. The Cape Western Black Sash News Sheet, no. 5 (September, 1957), 4, Black Sash Archival Collection.

⁵⁰⁷ See for example, W.B. Ngakane, “Passes and Africans,” *The Black Sash* 2, no. 9 (November 1957), 5-6; Bertha Thage, “An African Mother Tells the Sash: ‘Why We Don’t Want Passes’,” *The Black Sash* 3, no. 19 (June/July 1959), 20-21; Lewis Nkosi, “I Am A Reference Book,” *The Black Sash* 3, no. 19 (June/July 1959), 16.

Savior's Hall in Cape Town.⁵⁰⁸ The woman explained that she was breastfeeding, "and couldn't risk being arrested without her baby—a risk she took every time she went out."⁵⁰⁹ Mrs. Robb admitted, "up till then I had thought the pass laws were a rather neat way of controlling the influx of Africans into 'our' city."⁵¹⁰ Afterward, she considered pass laws as "the single most iniquitous system, imposed on Africans only."⁵¹¹

On 9 August, 1957 C.A.T.A.P.A.W. sent a multi-racial delegation to the Chief Native Affairs Commissioner to explain how the application of pass laws to African women was disrupting African families.⁵¹² Later that day 200 women assembled at Drill Hall in Cape Town for an inter-racial public protest meeting.⁵¹³ There are conflicting reports of what happened at the meeting. The "Cape Western News Sheet," presents the meeting as a unified gathering to show disapproval of "yet another interference with the fundamental rights of the individual."⁵¹⁴ Scanlon provides two versions of the meeting which highlight conflicts between forms of protest adopted by black and white women. According to the first version, while Helen Suzman was speaking inside the hall, a large group of women gathered on the promenade outside the hall. Six different women addressed the crowd outside the hall using a microphone. Eulalie Stott and Flora Snitcher of the NCW attempted to get the women to move inside. Later, Mrs. Stott

⁵⁰⁸ Robb, *The Sash and I*, 41.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² According to Noel Robb, the delegation included members of the Black Sash, the ANCWL and the FSAW. Robb, 42.

⁵¹³ "Cape Western Black Sash News Sheet" No. 5, 3, Black Sash Archival Collection.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid. 9 August 1957 was the first anniversary of the women's march to Pretoria.

disassociated herself from the sentiments expressed by the speakers outside.⁵¹⁵ For her part, Eulalie Stott described the women outside as “toy-toying...it was sort of a worked-up atmosphere...not the sort of ordinary dull attendance at Liberal Party or Black Sash meetings...I think we were all rather overcome by it. I don’t remember trying to get them to stop but I do remember trying to get them to come inside...”⁵¹⁶ Scanlon concludes that “the diverse nature of alliance in C.A.T.A.P.A.W. which brought together radicals from the ANCWL and the COD with conservative members of the NCW and Black Sash proved problematic.”⁵¹⁷ However, diversity does not necessarily equate to “problematic.”

Noel Robb, who attended the meeting with her 70 year old mother, recalled that her mother “was a little amazed by the way black woman shouted...and fed their babies in public.” However, her mother “fully supported their protest.” In Mrs. Robb’s opinion, the meeting in Drill Hall “was one of the most successful meetings of all time.”⁵¹⁸ Given the proscription against meetings of more than 10 Africans outside a location under the NLAA, organizing and attending this large multi-racial protest meeting demonstrates the

⁵¹⁵ A. Griessel, “C.A.T.A.P.A.W. and the Anti-Pass Campaign in Cape Town in the Fifties,” in L. Cooper and D. Kaplan, eds., *Selected Research on Aspects of Organization in the Western Cape*, (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1982, 11, cited in Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 90.

⁵¹⁶ Interview with Eulalie Stott, 6 August 1999, quoted in Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 90.

⁵¹⁷ Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 90. Scanlon also suggests that Cape Western’s Participation in C.A.T.A.P.A.W. “brought them into direct conflict with the national leadership before the headquarters were moved to the Western Cape.” While the national leaders of the Black Sash in Johannesburg viewed the Cape Western Region as more liberal than other regions, including their own, they nevertheless supported Cape Western’s participation in C.A.T.A.P.A.W. The minutes of the National Council meeting on 4 September 1957 reflect that the national leaders of the Black Sash agreed that the “objections to Cape Western Region joining C.A.T.A.P.A.W. lodged by the Lowveld and Orange Free State Regions were found to be erroneous.” The Black Sash, Minutes of the Committee Meeting, 4 September 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁵¹⁸ Robb, *The Sash and I*, 42.

determination of the women of C.A.T.A.P.A.W. to work together to oppose the racialized patriarchal structures of apartheid.⁵¹⁹

It does not appear that C.A.T.A.P.A.W. arranged many large demonstrations after 9 August 1957.⁵²⁰ The Cape Western News Sheet mentions C.A.T.P.A.W.'s involvement in a protest over pass raids by 100 women in Nyanga Township in January, 1958 and a protest meeting against passes attended by 100 people in the banqueting hall at Cape Town City Hall in November 1959.⁵²¹ Scanlon suggests that there were tensions between the ANCWL and the Cape Western Black Sash over the Black Sash Bail Fund established in 1958 "because the Black Sash was helping women who had taken out passes."⁵²² A letter from Molly Petersen to Jean Sinclair in November 1958 confirms that there were tensions over the Bail Fund. However, Mrs. Petersen attributed these tensions to white women from the COD who participated in C.A.T.A.P.A.W. through the FSAW. She complained that the COD "twice put us in a very awkward position during a protest over passes to African women ...[and] just last week ...tried to show us in a wrong light with African women, by making capital out of our inability to give African women an unequivocal promise of our assistance."⁵²³ Mrs. Petersen emphasized the importance of

⁵¹⁹ The 9 August C.A.T.A.P.A.W. demonstration occurred at the height of the internal controversy over disobeying the "Church Clause" of the NLAA, as described in Chapter Four.

⁵²⁰ The activities of C.A.T.A.P.A.W. are not well documented as other researchers have found. See, Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 204.

⁵²¹ The Black Sash, Cape Western Black Sash News Sheet No. 12 (October, 1959); Cape Western Black Sash News Sheet No. 13 (December 1959), The Black Sash Archival Collection, Cape Western Archive: BC 668.D.2, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department. Annie Silinga was the keynote speaker at the protest meeting in November, 1959.

⁵²² Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 91,

⁵²³ Molly Petersen to Jean Sinclair, 21 November, 1958, Black Sash Society Papers. In order to get approval from the other regions to establish a bail fund, Cape Western promised that they would not provide bail to women who broke the law on purpose. Minutes of National Conference in Johannesburg (June 10-12), 1958, Black Sash Society Papers.

establishing and expanding personal relationships with women in the ANCWL through regular “drawing room chats” to avoid misunderstandings.⁵²⁴ According to Mary Burton, “small house meetings, which Noel Robb described as ‘Bridge Clubs’, were an essential part of the project to educate white women about the effect of passes.”⁵²⁵

A combination of factors helps to explain why C.A.T.A.P.A.W. was not more active in the Western Cape after 1957. Experienced leaders in the FSAW like Ray Alexander were banned or, like Dora Tamana, constantly harassed by the authorities.⁵²⁶ Moreover, liberal white women in the Black Sash and the NCW maintained perspectives situated in white privilege. As willing as some of them were to break the law by holding a multi-racial meeting, they had very different views about supporting African women who burned passes or otherwise courted arrest. Although the “Church Clause” of the NLAA was not enforced against the Churches in 1957, the Black Sash feared that it might be enforced against them.⁵²⁷ Between 1957 and 1960, other groups left C.A.T.A.P.A.W. until only the Black Sash, the ANCWL and FSAW remained. Following the anti-pass campaign in 1960 when the ANCWL and many members of the FSAW were banned, C.A.T.A.P.A.W. ceased to be viable and the Black Sash announced its closure. Eulalie

⁵²⁴ Molly Peterson to Jean Sinclair, 21 November, 1958, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁵²⁵ Mary Burton in personal conversation with the author, Rondebosch, Cape Town, 31 July, 2009.

⁵²⁶ Wells, *We Now Demand!* 111. Dora Tamana, like other African women in the Cape reluctantly accepted a reference book because without it, she could not receive her old-age pension. Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 180.

⁵²⁷ Mrs. Corrigan’s request to represent the Black Sash at a meeting which included the Liberal Party, the Methodist Association of African Women, the National Council of African women and possibly the National Council of Women and vote in favour of the resolution, “We will Never Accept Passes for Women,” was denied. The Central Executive feared that “a meeting of this type might involve the same principles as the NLAA.” The Black Sash, Minutes of Southern Transvaal Regional Committee Meeting, 25 September 1957, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

Stott announced the decision to end C.A.T.A.P.A.W. following a meeting of the Cape Western Black Sash.⁵²⁸

However, the personal contacts between members of the Cape Western Black Sash and the ANCWL fostered under C.A.T.A.P.A.W. continued to grow. Lettie Malindi, a leader in the Western Cape ANCWL and the FSAW, who had helped to organize the Congress of the People in Kliptown in 1955, was one of the organizers of C.A.T.A.P.A.W. In 1957, the ANC gave her a mandate to “teach the white women about passes.”⁵²⁹ She worked at the Bail Fund Office and the Advice Office as a translator from 1958 through 1986.⁵³⁰ In addition to translating, when the office first opened she often had to explain over and over the right way to handle cases to new, white volunteers. The new volunteers would then ask another white woman how to go about it. Although this was frustrating for her, she persevered and she recalled that “after awhile,” the white women understood that “these African people know what they are talking about. They

⁵²⁸ Although Scanlon implies that the decision was dictated by the Black Sash, the other white women’s organizations had ended their involvement and the ANC and ANCWL had been banned. *Representation and Reality*, 91. By 1961, the Black Sash Bail Fund Office was fully engaged in providing practical assistance to Africans who wanted to avoid being endorsed out of the Western Cape and multi-racial protests had been banned following the 1960 State of Emergency.

⁵²⁹ Mary Burton, in personal conversation with the author, 31 July 2009, Rondebosch, Cape Town.

⁵³⁰ Scanlon, 267. Dora Tamana, Nellie Jibiliza, Dorothy Zihlangu and Mildred Lesiea of the ANCWL also volunteered to work in the Bail Fund Office. According to Mrs. Malindi they left the office because they were frustrated by “talking all the time, explaining to the white ladies, all the time explaining.” Interview with Lettie Malindi cited in Spinks, *The Black Sash*, 64.

know these laws; they know what they want and what they are saying in God's truth."⁵³¹

Noel Robb, who managed the Advice Office, recalled that from the beginning, "Mrs. Malindi was so much more than an interpreter--she taught us all we knew about the effects of influx control. We knew what the law said, but she knew, and suffered from its administration."⁵³² Illustrating the privileged perspectives of the white women of the Black Sash in the Western Cape who did not need to work to support their families, Mrs. Malindi was employed as a volunteer translator during 1958 until Eulalie Stott suggested that she be employed as a paid translator because she needed to support her "babies."⁵³³

However, genuine friendship developed between Mrs. Malindi and her white colleagues. Mrs. Malindi recounted that while she was in detention following the State of Emergency in 1960, one of her children died. The Cape Western Black Sash successfully lobbied for her release and a group of Black Sash women met her at the train station to take her home.⁵³⁴ On several occasions while she was in detention, Mrs. Malindi was questioned

⁵³¹ Ibid. Scanlon quotes a reference to Mrs. Malindi's "gaiety and wit" as evidence that she was patronized by her white co-workers in the Advice Office. However, the full text of this comment reveals that it was not intended as patronizing. The report on the bail fund for April-October 1959 states, "Mrs. Lettie Malindi, a member of the ANC Women's League has been engaged as a paid interpreter. Her gaiety, wit and knowledge of the ramifications of pass laws are invaluable to this office. When she was arrested a second time this year for not carrying a permit (she is exempted) the office certainly knew the difference." The report also stated, "We have learnt so much, especially in working with the ANC Women's League." Cape Western's Report on the Bail Fund: April to October 1959, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3. The archives reveal that when women resigned or went overseas and returned, the minutes often referred to her "gaiety," "wit," or "humor." When Mrs. Roberts returned from overseas, the Cape Western News Sheet reported, "we ... particularly missed the humor, wit and realistic approach she brought to our meetings. The Black Sash, Cape Western News Sheet, No. 12 (October, 1959), Black Sash Archival Collection, Cape Western Archives: BC 668.D.2, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department.

⁵³² Robb, *The Sash and I*, 40-41.

⁵³³ Lettie Malindi interviewed by Ruendree Govinder in Cape Town, 23 May 2005, South Africa: Overcoming Apartheid Building Democracy, online, <http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/video.php?id=31> Michigan State University African Studies Center and MATRIX (accessed 10 February 2010).

⁵³⁴ Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 267. To reduce the risk that African women activists would be arrested by the authorities, white women in the Black Sash often drove African women to meetings in Cape Town, to the ferry to Robbin Island or to Pollsmoor Prison to visit their loved ones. Tish Haynes, in personal conversation with the author, 1 August 2009, Rondebosch, Cape Town.

about the activities of the Black Sash by the police. She maintained that she did not speak English well and was employed by the Black Sash as the “cleaning lady” so as not to “let [the Black Sash] down.”⁵³⁵

The Cape Western Black Sash was also involved in planning and coordinating a multi-racial Group Areas conference on 21 and 22 February, 1958.⁵³⁶ Cape Western reported that delegates from “non-European bodies” predominated among more than 100 delegates. This conference provided the organizational outline for what would become the Black Sash Bail Fund Office and later the Athlone Advice Office. The delegates resolved to establish a “fighting fund” for a panel of attorneys to help those affected by removals and to create an ad-hoc committee to open an office where “people who are threatened by the Act can get legal advice on how to defend their homes and livelihoods.”⁵³⁷ As the government’s implementation of the Group Areas Act and the CLPP continued unremittingly, many African women accepted passes to prove their right to remain in the Cape. Although the Cape Western Black Sash opposed passes for women, they also recognized that many women had accepted reference books and were subject to arrest if they were not in order. Women could not receive pensions without a pass and often they were required to show their passes when they paid rent.⁵³⁸ Many women arrested for pass law violations were endorsed out to rural reserves because they

⁵³⁵ Robb, *The Sash and I*, 46.

⁵³⁶ The Black Sash, Cape Western Black Sash News Sheet No. 7 (March 1958), University of Cape Town Libraries Manuscripts and Archives Department, Black Sash Archival Collection: BC 668.D.2.

⁵³⁷ The conference also resolved to call on all organizations not to assist the Group Areas Board in the implementation of the Act. Ibid.

⁵³⁸ The Black Sash, Secretary’s Notes of National Council Meeting, 13 June 1959, 41, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: 2552 reel 3.

could not prove that they were entitled to reside in the Cape under Section 10(1) (c) of the NLAA.

In April 1958, the Cape Western Black Sash engaged in practical resistance to pass laws, residence permits and forced removals by operating a Bail Fund Office where they provided loans for bail and free advice to African women on how to avoid being endorsed out to the reserves.⁵³⁹ Initially the Bail Fund Office was a source of tension between some women activists in the ANCWL and the COD and the Black Sash. As Mary Burton described it, this tension was between “two poles—resistance and helping people pragmatically. Given the circumstances, given the scheme of things, the question was how to work between the two poles.”⁵⁴⁰ When the Cape Western Black Sash first created the Bail Fund in 1958, few women requested assistance.⁵⁴¹ Within two months of opening the Bail Fund Office, however, women in the Cape Western Black Sash began attending the Langa Pass Court daily and maintained a roster of women who volunteered

⁵³⁹Cape Western Black Sash News Sheet, No. 8 (September 1958). University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department, Black Sash Archival Collection: BC 668.D.2; R.N. Robb, “The Athlone Advice Office: Highlights of the Work Done by Cape Western Region During the Last Ten Years,” (1965), 1. University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department, Black Sash Archival Collection: BC1092. B.2.1. The Bail Fund was initially funded by loans from supporters of the Black Sash. Once women appeared in court, the bail was returned and the “loan” was repaid to the Bail Fund. The proposal for a bail fund office operated by the Cape Western Region received unanimous approval at the National Conference in 1958. The Black Sash, Minutes of National Conference at Johannesburg (10-12 June 1958), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3. The Black Sash opened an office for two reasons. As more African women came to trust women of the Black Sash, the numbers of African women who travelled at great cost to white women’s homes for advice increased throughout all hours of the day and night. The office kept regular hours and was located closer to where African women lived. “Cape Western’s Report of the Bail Fund,” Minutes of Black Sash National Council Meeting, 13 June, 1959, 42, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁵⁴⁰Mary Burton in personal conversation with the author, 31 July 2009, According to Mrs. Burton, in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s similar conflicts arose within the Black Sash between “those who wanted to resolve the political agenda and those who wanted to extend a helping hand to people through the Advice Offices.”

⁵⁴¹Cape Western’s Report of the Bail Fund, 42, Black Sash Society Papers.

to attend one day per week.⁵⁴² Monitoring pass courts and working in the Bail Fund Office enabled white women to see for themselves the hardships suffered by African women under apartheid and demonstrated to African women that Black Sash women's opposition to apartheid was sincere. Moreover, Africans noticed that the white women's attendance at pass courts forced the pass court Magistrates to treat Africans a little more humanely.⁵⁴³ After women of the Cape Western Black Sash began attending the Langa Pass Court, the Bail Fund received more support from the ANCWL.⁵⁴⁴ By 1959 the Cape Western Black Sash expanded assistance to African men and the Bail Fund Office became the Advice Office in 1962.⁵⁴⁵

“The Shocking Injustices Perpetrated on our Doorstep” Southern Transvaal Black Sash, the ANCWL Anti-Pass Campaign and the Bishop's Committee

A majority of women on the Black Sash National Council supported the increasing involvement of the Cape Western Region in multi-racial alliances and their practical resistance to apartheid through pass court monitoring and the Bail Fund Office during 1958. However, many branch members in the Southern Transvaal Region of the Black Sash were reluctant to engage in multi-racial alliances themselves. Following the N.P.'s victory in Parliamentary Elections at the end of April, 1958, the Southern Transvaal Region which included Johannesburg was in a state of disarray. Mrs. Dora

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ The Black Sash Archival Collection, Cape Western Archive: BC 668 E.10, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department.

⁵⁴⁴ Cape Western Report of the Bail Fund, 41; Cape Western News Sheet, No. 9 (December 1958), Black Sash Archival Collection, Cape Western Region Archives: BC 668.D.2, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department.

⁵⁴⁵ The Black Sash, Cape Western Black Sash News Sheet No. 18, (March 1962), The Black Sash Archival Collection, Cape Western Region Archives: BC 668.D.2, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department.

Hill, Chairman of the Southern Transvaal Region, who provided significant regional and national leadership to mediate internal conflicts in the Black Sash during 1956 and 1957, took ill suddenly and required surgery. She was forced to resign as chair due to ill health and Mrs. Sinclair resigned from the Central Executive to take Mrs. Hill's place.⁵⁴⁶ Dwindling branch membership in the aftermath of the 1958 elections required the region to reorganize into a loose collection of groups and branches.⁵⁴⁷ As a result of dwindling membership, Mrs. Hill's illness and Mrs. Sinclair's resignation from the Central Executive, members of the Southern Transvaal Region decided that they could no longer provide the financial and administrative support necessary to maintain the Central Executive in the Southern Transvaal Region. The Cape Western Region was the only Region capable of taking on this additional responsibility and the delegates to the emergency National Council Meeting in June 1958 reluctantly approved the move. More significantly, the delegates also agreed on a three dimensional Programme of Action which included continuing public protests over unjust laws; working to establish a new Constitution for South Africa which would safeguard the rights of all of its people; and pro-active work determined by each region to alleviate the effects of unjust laws and bring pressure to bear on responsible authorities.⁵⁴⁸

During the reorganization of the Southern Transvaal Region and the relocation of the Central Executive to Cape Western, the leaders of the Southern Transvaal Region were confronted with several challenges. First, in July and August the municipal

⁵⁴⁶ The Black Sash, Minutes of the Southern Transvaal Regional Committee, 21 May 1958, 1, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁵⁴⁷ Minutes of the Southern Transvaal Regional Committee, 21 May 1958, 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁵⁴⁸ Jean Sinclair, "Jobs for All" *The Black Sash* III, no. 10 (September, 1958): 1-3

government in Johannesburg refused three requests by the Black Sash to hold public meetings. Their refusals were based on the “Church Clause” of the NLAA. As the Cape Western Region had predicted in 1957, the women of the Southern Transvaal were confronted with the conflict between their principles of political morality and the restrictions on freedom of assembly imposed by the “Church Clause.” The region also faced an internal conflict over whether to focus exclusively on educating the white electorate or move toward sustained alliances with black South Africans to oppose apartheid. The reorganization of the region, their confrontations with the government over the NLAA and the internal conflict over the focus of the Southern Transvaal Black Sash coincided with the anti-pass campaign by the ANCWL and the FSAW in Johannesburg during the latter half of 1958. These events forced the leadership to re-examine the effectiveness of the Black Sash among the white community and the strategy of forming inter-racial alliances in the Northern provinces.

The battle between the Southern Transvaal Black Sash and the Johannesburg City Council and the Nationalist Government began in July 1958 after Dr. Verwoerd imposed a ban on meetings of more than 10 Africans in the Witwatersrand under the “Church Clause.” On 2 July, 1958 the Black Sash requested permission from the Johannesburg Town Clerk to hold a public meeting on the steps of City Hall on 18 July to protest the Special Criminal Court Amendment Bill through which the government proposed to try

the Treason Trial Defendants.⁵⁴⁹ The day before the meeting, the Town Clerk informed Mrs. Sinclair that the police objected to the meeting on the steps of City Hall because more than 10 Africans might be in attendance. Since the bill was controversial, the police claimed that African tempers would likely be inflamed by the meeting leading to unrest. As a result of police objections the Town Clerk refused to issue a permit for the meeting.⁵⁵⁰ The Black Sash cancelled the meeting because they did not want Africans who might attend to be arrested.⁵⁵¹ On 2 August, Mrs. Sinclair requested approval from the Johannesburg Town Clerk to hold a public meeting on the City Hall steps regarding the proposed increase in African taxation. The General Purposes Committee of the Johannesburg City Council refused her request on advice of the Deputy Police Commissioner of the Witwatersrand because of the ban on meetings of more than 10 Africans, citing continued fears of African unrest. The Black Sash responded by holding a silent demonstration with placards asking “Is it Just to Tax the Poorest?” on the City Hall steps.⁵⁵²

On 12 August the Black Sash requested permission to hold another public meeting on the City Hall steps on August 20th to raise concerns about the extension of the

⁵⁴⁹ The Special Court was convened by the government and the judges were to be appointed by the government. The Black Sash objected to the bill because it was rushed through Parliament without opportunity for debate and it permitted the Executive Branch to take over powers reserved for the Judicial Branch of government. “Special Report of Mrs. Sinclair” attached to Report of Southern Transvaal Region Activities Since the Special National Council Meeting in June, 1958, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁵⁵⁰ When the Minister of Justice was later questioned in Parliament by Mr. Etienne Malan regarding the reason the Black Sash meeting had been cancelled, Mr. Swart replied that the Deputy Police Commissioner had information that there was “likely to be trouble at the meeting.” Mrs. Sinclair did not understand how the Deputy Police Commissioner had obtained such information as the meeting was not publicized to anyone before her request to the Town Clerk. Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² “Special Report by Mrs. Sinclair,” 2, Black Sash Society Papers. The Black Sash also held a meeting on 2 September at St. Luke’s Hall on the effects of African Taxation. Speakers included Dr. Ellen Hellman, Mr. Oliver Tambo, and Mr. Alex Hepple but the meeting was not well-attended.

franchise to white, 18 year olds. This time, the General Purposes Committee of the City Council granted permission but pointed out that permission must also be granted by the Minister of Native Affairs.⁵⁵³ Initially, the Sash received verbal permission from his office and Mrs. Sinclair was advised that she could pick up the written permission in two hours. When she arrived however, written permission was denied based on an undisclosed, “hitch.”⁵⁵⁴ The Black Sash responded by holding another silent demonstration at the time and place scheduled for the meeting. They held placards proclaiming, “Verwoerd has gagged the citizens of Johannesburg” and handed out pamphlets claiming that the government had taken away the rights of freedom of speech and assembly.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵³ Special Report of Mrs. Sinclair, 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Special Report by Mrs. Sinclair, 2, Black Sash Society Papers.



IT IS OUR RIGHT

*to protest from these steps against The
Criminal Courts Amendment Act*

--The Police Objected

IT IS OUR RIGHT

*to protest from these steps against
Increased African Taxation*

--Permission was Refused

**IT IS EVERY
CITIZENS RIGHT**

to assembly publicly and speak freely

We stand today in silent protest because per-
mission to speak from these steps has been
refused us.
We wanted you to hear what it meant to the

poorest people in South Africa to have their
taxes nearly doubled—increased African taxa-
tion must mean increased hunger, disease and
crime.

Citizens of Johannesburg !

Watch the Press for the date and place of the public meeting which should have been held
here.

**Your Rights of Freedom and Assembly have
been taken away**

PRINTED BY P. C. WESTWOOD, 220 MAIN ROAD, FORDSBURG, JOHANNESBURG AND ISSUED
BY THE BLACK SASH, 11 VALLEY ROAD, WESTCLIFF, JOHANNESBURG

Figure 3 Black Sash pamphlet handed out at silent demonstrations on steps of Johannesburg City Hall. Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

Risking further antagonism with the UP and highlighting once again the ineffective opposition by UP City Council members to the National Party government, the Black Sash sent a delegation of women to meet with the General Purposes Committee of the Johannesburg City Council. They also requested a meeting with Dr. Verwoerd and

the Police Commissioner of the Witwatersrand. The delegation was led by Mrs. Sinclair and Mrs. Foley who told the City Council that their refusals to allow the Black Sash to hold public meetings on the steps of Johannesburg City Hall demonstrated that the denial of the right of free assembly to one section of the community entailed a denial of rights to all sections of the community.⁵⁵⁶ The delegation requested that the City Council demand an explanation from Dr. Verwoerd as to why he was denying the citizens of Johannesburg the rights of free speech and assembly. Although the Police Commissioner and Dr. Verwoerd refused to meet with the women, Dr. Verwoerd's assistant sent a lengthy reply on his behalf explaining his reasons for imposing the ban and promised to lift the ban. Mrs. Sinclair characterized the confrontations over the Black Sash meetings as ultimately, "a tangible success... [which] is proof that our new policy of bringing pressure to bear on those concerned with the making and implementation of unjust laws is effective."⁵⁵⁷

Not everyone in the Southern Transvaal Region was convinced that the Black Sash should continue to take up issues related to the loss of liberty by Africans. Understanding that the UP were anxious to blame the Black Sash for losses in the 1958 elections, more conservative Black Sash leaders led by Mrs. Foley, maintained that the Black Sash should focus exclusively on educating the white electorate.⁵⁵⁸ The Southern

⁵⁵⁶ Special Report by Mrs. Sinclair, 3, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid. The confrontations over the Black Sash protests and Dr. Verwoerd's reply were summarized in *The Black Sash* which heralded his reply as both a victory and a warning because Dr. Verwoerd acknowledged the rights of free speech and assembly for Europeans only. *The Black Sash* 3, no. 10 (September 1958), 15-16, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 3446 reel 5.

⁵⁵⁸ Illustrating that Black Sash leaders around the country had begun to realize that effective opposition to apartheid required more than educating the white electorate, a resolution restricting the focus of the Black Sash exclusively to "educating the white electorate" was rejected at the emergency National

Transvaal Regional Council disagreed sharply about whether cooperation with “non-white groups” fulfilled the objective of educating the white electorate.⁵⁵⁹ In August, 1958 they briefly discussed setting up a bail fund and the council formed a sub-committee to look into the matter further.⁵⁶⁰ The debate over policy continued in the September meeting. Mrs. Hill recommended that they continue to follow a two-pronged agenda of educating the white electorate while cooperating with African groups opposing unjust laws on a case-by-case basis.⁵⁶¹ In a memo entitled “The Attitude of the Southern Transvaal Region to Nationalism, White Privilege and Non-White Political Groups,” Mrs. Hill examined political developments since 1955 and argued that it was essential to establish and maintain ties with “Non-Whites” in order to remain true to the principle of political morality.⁵⁶² Mrs. Hill noted that “since the Black Sash came into existence in 1955...Nationalism has become more extreme and we have seen increased restrictions,

Council Meeting, in June 1958 in Johannesburg. However, Mrs. Tracy of the Lowveld group continued to promote an exclusive focus on educating the white electorate. Her proposed regional resolution provided, “That as the aims of the Black Sash can only be achieved by influencing the white electorate, care shall be exercised at all times not to prejudice and influence in the public mind by the association of the Black Sash with groups whose final aims are very different from our own.” Her resolution was rejected. The Black Sash, Minutes of the Southern Transvaal Regional Committee Meeting, 27 August, 1958, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

⁵⁵⁹ Minutes of the Southern Transvaal Regional Committee Meeting, 27 August 1958, 2, Black Sash Society Papers. The battle over public meetings on the steps of the Johannesburg City Hall caused many Black Sash members in Johannesburg to realize that limiting the Black Sash agenda to educational activities had proved ineffective against the totalitarianism of apartheid.

⁵⁶⁰ Minutes of the Southern Transvaal Regional Committee Meeting, 27 August 1958, 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁵⁶¹ The Black Sash, “The Attitude of the Southern Transvaal Region to Nationalism, White Privilege and Non-White Political Groups,” 4, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2. Mrs. Hill’s reasoned that by continuing to protest injustice to Africans and by collaborating with African opposition groups on matters of common concern, the Black Sash would be educating the white electorate and might lend credibility to African concerns in the minds of white voters. (3-4).

⁵⁶² The Black Sash, “The Attitude of the Southern Transvaal Region to Nationalism, White Privilege and Non-White Political Groups,” 4, Black Sash Society Papers.

deprivations of rights and a march toward dictatorship.”⁵⁶³ Mrs. Hill observed that in 1955, “many of us realized...that politics and political principles could not be kept separate from ...moral principles. [Over time] we have come to see that the principles of political parties must be examined in the light of Christianity and of Western Civilization.”⁵⁶⁴ Reiterating the moral standard by which the Black Sash examined apartheid legislation generally, Mrs. Hill asserted, “all our protests against discriminatory legislation stemmed from our belief that such legislation, since it is morally wrong cannot be politically right.”⁵⁶⁵ Mrs. Hill then focused on commonalities between white and non-white groups who opposed apartheid stating, “The Black Sash therefore has much in common with [whites] whose consciences have forced them to reject the principle of white superiority and with the Non-White political groups who seek to free themselves from the injustice of apartheid.”⁵⁶⁶ Addressing the ineffective opposition of the UP, she observed carefully, “The main opposition party looks to the electorate to put it in power and therefore cannot present uncompromising and effective opposition to apartheid as long as the majority of white voters are determined to preserve their position of privilege regardless of the injustice of such an attitude.”⁵⁶⁷ Referring to the moral authority of the Black Sash even amidst the efflux of members, Mrs. Hill said, “The unique function of

⁵⁶³ “The Attitude of the Southern Transvaal Region to Nationalism, White Privilege and Non-White Political Groups,” 1, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ “The Attitude of the Southern Transvaal Region to Nationalism, White Privilege and Non-White Political Groups,” 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

the Black Sash is to show uncompromising opposition based on principle. We are not a vast movement but we have built up respect and we do wield a certain influence.”⁵⁶⁸

Mrs. Hill then summarized her understanding of the purpose of the Black Sash and combined Black Sash goals with mission Christian principles of justice and peace. She explained, “The main objects of our existence are to state when laws are unprincipled, to protest against them, and to encourage the electorate to think in terms of justice, peace, and charity... for it is certain that a society that does not achieve change by peaceful means will find that it gets change by violence.”⁵⁶⁹ Mrs. Hill acknowledged the validity of focusing on the white electorate because they “wield power disproportionate to their numbers.”⁵⁷⁰ However, Mrs. Hill also recognized that Black Sash protests focused on injustices perpetrated against Africans had resulted in “Non-Whites” coming to the conclusion “that we are their ally.”⁵⁷¹ Mrs. Hill noted ruefully, “[whether we are allies] may or may not be so since we have never tried to find out how many Non-Whites agree with our principles.”⁵⁷² Mrs. Hill suggested that the reluctance by Black Sash leaders to make sustained connections with black opposition groups was “an acute source of difficulty and embarrassment” which the Sash had tried to avoid through its constitutional prohibition against affiliation with other groups. However, Mrs. Hill argued, “...in the end, constitutional clauses are no substitute for deep thought.”⁵⁷³

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ “The Attitude of the Southern Transvaal Region to Nationalism, White Privilege and Non-White Political Groups,” 3, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

Mrs. Hill concluded her consideration of the concerns which now confronted Southern Transvaal Region of the Black Sash by suggesting three alternatives regarding cooperation with black opposition groups. She thought the Black Sash could refuse to become “involved in any way with “Non-whites and their organizations...[or] “ally ourselves with the existing non-white political groups...or ...establish channels of communication through which we could hear what non-whites want for South Africa...”⁵⁷⁴ Mrs. Hill rejected the first alternative because “we would abandon [black South Africans] to the extremes which we fear and when, as is inevitable, white domination fails, we will have thrown away our right to have any say in the alternative.”⁵⁷⁵ She rejected the second alternative because, “we, as a small white group could not hope to influence materially such groups as the Federation of South African Women ...but would be used by their dedicated leaders who ...we could not hope to challenge directly.”⁵⁷⁶ Mrs. Hill thought that the third alternative had the best chance of success because after listening to what black South Africans wanted, “we could in turn, put our view to them... [and] if we were successful in winning ...African women to our point of view, we could hope that they would be successful in influencing their political organizations in exactly the same way as we expect the Black Sash to influence their political parties.”⁵⁷⁷

While the Southern Transvaal Regional Council debated whether to attempt sustained cooperation with black political organizations, African women’s protests

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. Like many women in the Black Sash, Mrs. Hill believed that the FSAW was led by Communists from the COD.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

against passes were becoming increasingly militant. Following the precedent of courting arrest adopted by the women in the Bloemfontein anti-pass campaign in 1913, thousands of women engaged in anti-pass protests in Johannesburg and over 2,000 women volunteered for arrest during the last two weeks in October.⁵⁷⁸ A joint meeting of the Women's Executive of the FSAW and ANCWL unanimously agreed that no bail should be paid.⁵⁷⁹ The internal debate in the Black Sash was overtaken by events and the regional leaders were undecided over how to respond as African women's protests grew in size and militancy. The meeting on 22 October illustrates how unprepared they were. Mrs. Hall suggested asking for cooperation from other (white) women's groups to call on the police to "treat African women properly."⁵⁸⁰ Mrs. Cluver wanted the press to publish the facts in a "prominent position." She thought African reporters should investigate arrests of African women protesters but cautioned, "We must be careful about incitement."⁵⁸¹ She also suggested that Black Sash women go to the courts to find out the facts. Mrs. Sinclair suggested a letter-writing campaign and Mrs. Tunbridge wanted to organize protests with men's organizations.⁵⁸² After prolonged discussion, they decided to set up a bail fund because, as Mrs. Davidoff argued, "We cannot ignore the shocking injustices happening on our doorstep."⁵⁸³ Mrs. Sinclair asked for a loan from the region in the amount of L200 to establish the bail fund and the others agreed on the condition that

⁵⁷⁸ Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 218.

⁵⁷⁹ Wells, 120. As the number of women in jail continued to grow, the Transvaal Executive of the ANC took over authority for the women's anti-pass campaign and decided, to the consternation of the women, that bail should be paid. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 218-219.

⁵⁸⁰ The Black Sash, Minutes of Special Committee Meeting, 22 October, 1958, 1. CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Minutes of Special Committee Meeting, 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁵⁸³ The Black Sash, Minutes of Special Committee Meeting, 12 November 1959, 2, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

it be repaid.⁵⁸⁴ They decided to issue a press release announcing that the Black Sash was setting up a bail fund and explaining why the Black Sash opposed passes for African women. The press release stressed African women's fear of immediate arrest, separation from their children, and the disintegration of families.⁵⁸⁵

In November, 1958 women in the Waverly Branch of the Black Sash learned that the police were passing out flyers to homeowners advising them to register their female domestic servants for a reference book.⁵⁸⁶ The flyer implied that registration was mandatory showing that the reach of the apartheid state into the domestic space of the home extended even into European homes. The flyer also implied that registration was for the purpose of obtaining an identity card similar to that which white women would be required to obtain in the following months. The Waverly Branch created a pamphlet which corrected these errors, advising homeowners that registration was not mandatory, homeowners were under no obligation to register their domestic servants and that the reference book was in fact a pass. The pamphlet also noted that African women objected to passes because passes subjected women to personal indignities and interfered with an African woman's ability to care for their children. The pamphlet was careful to state the

⁵⁸⁴ Mrs. Sinclair was reprimanded by the Central Executive for using the region's money for the bail fund without first obtaining permission from the Central Executive even though the loan was promptly repaid. The Black Sash, Minutes of a Special Committee Meeting, 26 November, 1958, 2. CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid. The Black Sash archives do not reflect that the bail fund created antagonism between the Black Sash and the ANCWL, perhaps because the ANCWL had already acquiesced to the ANC's controversial directive to end the civil disobedience phase of the women's anti-pass campaign and accept bail. See, Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 220-221. By 12 November the L200 had "all been used." The Black Sash, Minutes of the Committee Meeting on 12 November 1958, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁵⁸⁶ Minutes of Special Committee Meeting, 2.

facts but avoided advising homeowners to refuse to register their domestic servants.⁵⁸⁷

Over the course of the last two months in 1958, the Waverly and Bryanston Branches distributed 20,000 pamphlets, often by walking through white suburbs around Johannesburg and placing them in mailboxes.⁵⁸⁸ In December, Mrs. Britten, acting on behalf of the SAIRR met with Mr. Koller of the Municipal Native Affairs Department regarding passes and the residence requirements of the NLAA. He confirmed that women were not required to register for passes until after their residency status had been approved but admitted that many of his men were requiring African women to register for a pass before they would issue a domicile permit.⁵⁸⁹

Even though a majority of members of the Black Sash in Johannesburg opposed passes for women they had not yet established many contacts with African women. Moreover, the leaders of the Southern Transvaal Region continued to disagree over cooperation with the ANCWL because of their involvement with the FSAW. As a result, they did not establish a cooperative interracial alliance like C.A.T.A.P.A.W. and there

⁵⁸⁷ The Black Sash, Minutes of Southern Transvaal Regional Committee, 14 January, 1959, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1. Many women in the Southern Transvaal Region remained concerned about breaking the law through “incitement.” Women in Sandringham refused to pass out the pamphlets correcting misinformation about reference books to homeowners because of this fear. The Black Sash, Minutes of Southern Transvaal Regional Committee, 26 November, 1958, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ The Black Sash, Minutes of the Southern Transvaal Regional Committee Meeting, 28 January 1959, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1. Mr. Koller confirmed to her that African women already in Johannesburg were entitled to a domicile permit if they were born in the area or their husband was entitled to residency under Section 10 (1) (a) or (b). The regulations demonstrate how strictly the government intended to control African women’s movements. In addition to domicile requirements, any woman already in Johannesburg had to prove that she was employed by registering her employment with a Labour Bureaux in order to obtain a pass. If a woman was not already resident in Johannesburg or was not employed she could remain in the area for no longer than 72 hours. If a woman wanted to remain in Johannesburg, she had to show that she had permission from the authorities in the rural area where she was born to come to Johannesburg and she had to have permission from the Johannesburg City Council who usually gave approval provided the woman was employed and could prove that she was entitled to residence under Section 10 (1). Ibid.

was minimal inter-racial cooperation between the Black Sash and other groups opposed to passes in 1958 in Johannesburg. As Mrs. Sinclair noted in September, “Our policy is right but its implementation is difficult.”⁵⁹⁰

“Exposing the scandal of which this country should be ashamed!”

Three significant developments during 1959 demonstrate the effectiveness of the 1958 Programme of Action both within the Black Sash and the broader community. As a result of these developments the Black Sash was propelled toward sustained alliances across racial divides and the women’s commitment to the struggle against apartheid deepened. In January 1959, the Black Sash learned that the Natives Representatives were to be abolished, ending the last vestige of African representation in Parliament. Mrs. Sinclair investigated the possibility of participating in a multi-racial protest and wrote to Cape Western about having a convoy to Cape Town. However, the white groups opposed to the abolition of Natives Representatives disagreed about whether the ANC should be asked to participate.⁵⁹¹ Mrs. Foley was adamant that the ANC not participate because of the ANC’s association with the COD.⁵⁹² Reminding the committee of their Programme of Action, Mrs. Hill told the committee, “We must make up our minds so that we can be effective. We must emphasize the importance of clear thinking on the concept

⁵⁹⁰ The Black Sash, Minutes of Southern Transvaal Regional Committee, 3 September, 1958, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁵⁹¹ Demonstrating the political distance between white liberals and African opinion, white liberals mistakenly believed that the ANC wanted to participate in a convoy to protest the removal of the white “Natives Representatives.”

⁵⁹² Mrs. Cluver argued that if they were going to “plead the cause of the African with the white electorate; they should have the support of the Africans themselves. Minutes of Regional Committee Meeting, 11 February, 1959, 1, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

of apartheid. We must cooperate with other organizations.”⁵⁹³ When the committee voted to continue Black Sash participation, Mrs. Foley resigned from the committee and asked for a leave of absence.⁵⁹⁴

As part of the Programme of Action to educate the white electorate and promote support for a new constitution, the Black Sash held a series of “Brains Trusts” around South Africa in 1959.⁵⁹⁵ “Brains Trusts” were public meetings at which multi-racial panels of men and women from as many political parties and organizations as would participate answered questions on current political issues posed by a question-master.⁵⁹⁶ On 24 February the Natal-Midlands Region held a “Brains Trust” in Pietermaritzburg. The subject for discussion was constitutional reform and included the issue of a non-racial franchise. Chief Luthuli was a member of the panel along with a member of the Liberal Party, a member of the NP and a member of the SAIC. Edgar Brookes was the question-master.⁵⁹⁷ On 12 March, the Natal-Coastal Region held a “Brains Trust” in Durban. Chief Luthuli was on the panel with Alan Paton, Fatima Meer and a member of the NP. They also discussed multi-racial suffrage under a new Constitution.⁵⁹⁸ Chief Luthuli spoke forthrightly about African aspirations for full citizenship under a universal

⁵⁹³ Minutes of Regional Committee Meeting, 2. Mrs. Sinclair called for two separate votes on the issue. Both votes were close but each time a simple majority voted against excluding the ANC from the convoy. (3).

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ “Brains Trusts” proved to be very popular with the public even in conservative areas where the Black Sash struggled to find members. The NP generally accepted the invitation to appear on a panel at a Brains Trust. The UP consistently declined the invitation, claiming that they refused to be associated with sentiments expressed by groups and political parties with whom they disagreed. See, “An Opportunity Missed,” *The Black Sash* III, no. 18 (May 1959): 7.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. Most panels included no more than one woman and the Sash attempted to make sure that all racial groups in the community were represented.

⁵⁹⁷ *The Black Sash* III, no. 17 (April 1959): 8. Over 500 people attended—more than could fit in the hall.

⁵⁹⁸ *The Black Sash* (April 1959), 15; *The Black Sash* (May 1959), 7.

non-racial franchise to the audience at both events. The “Brains Trusts were reported in the press and *The Black Sash* reported Chief Luthuli’s remarks at the Pietermaritzburg “Brains Trust” verbatim.⁵⁹⁹ Aside from positive press reports, there is little direct evidence regarding the impact of the “Brains Trusts” on the public. However, after he participated in the Brains Trusts in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, Chief Luthuli visited the Black Sash in Cape Town in May shortly before he was banned and spoke to region members at a private meeting in Noel Robb’s home.⁶⁰⁰ *The Black Sash* was unable to report what he said at the meeting because of the banning order. However, pointedly demonstrating that the government could not suppress private discussions of Chief Luthuli’s remarks, *The Black Sash* reported “...members are still discussing his address...Chief Luthuli, in his calm and thoughtful manner discussed as fully as time allowed the questions of suffrage and passes and answered many questions with directness and sincerity.”⁶⁰¹

Mrs. Sinclair reported to the Central Executive in March that the multi-racial convoy project was not progressing very well. A multi-racial protest committee had been formed but the only thing on which all members could agree was that they opposed apartheid. Mrs. Davidoff added that the ANC was “not keen on protesting the abolition

⁵⁹⁹ *The Black Sash* (April 1959), 14-15.

⁶⁰⁰ *The Black Sash* III, no. 21 (August 1959):15.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid. Although Chief Luthuli’s speech was apparently transcribed, Noel Robb burned the speech and other banned documents after she was visited by the Special Branch in 1966 and asked for documents related to Defense and Aid. On their first visit, the Police had not searched her home but she feared that they would return. Since her husband was away, she feared that if she were arrested for retaining banned papers, her son would be left alone. Robb, *The Sash and I*, 55-56.

of the Natives Representatives.”⁶⁰² By April, the only groups remaining on the protest committee were the Black Sash, the Liberal and Labour parties, the ANC and the COD. Every region of the Black Sash advised that they were opposed to continued participation in the convoy and the plan was scrapped.⁶⁰³ Then Bishop Ambrose Reeves, the Anglican Archbishop of Johannesburg, called a meeting of 14 organizations to see if they could find a basis for cooperation. The purpose of the meeting was to “engage in constructive thought with a view to possible action on matters of common interest.”⁶⁰⁴ The Black Sash was asked to serve on an ad hoc committee with members of the Liberal Party, the ANC and the COD. Mrs. Sinclair also reported that UP leaders were encouraging women to resign from the Black Sash over their association with the Bishop’s Committee. They whispered that the Black Sash were associating with the COD and forming a united front with Communists.⁶⁰⁵

While some members of the Southern Transvaal Region were focusing on the multi-racial convoy and the Bishop’s Committee, other members were involved in investigating the Farm Labour Scheme. According to a the regional report for May 1959, a Black Sash member in Johannesburg was asked by her African gardener for help in

⁶⁰² The Black Sash, Minutes of Southern Transvaal Regional Committee Meeting, 4 March, 1959, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2. Showing the distance between liberal white politics and the ANC, the SAIRR attended the meeting as observers and would not participate in the convoy. Neither the Federal Party nor the Progressive Party was willing to participate in a convoy with the ANC. Alan Paton was in favor of ANC participation but the Archbishop and other prominent men were still on the fence about lending their names in support of the convoy. Another meeting had been scheduled and Mrs. Sinclair called for a vote on whether the Black Sash should continue to participate. The committee voted 14 to 2 to continue participation. (3).

⁶⁰³ Minutes of Southern Transvaal Regional Committee Meeting, 29 April, 1959, 2, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 2.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Secretary’s Notes of National Council Meeting June 1959, 9, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3.

locating his 17 year old son who had been missing for two days. It turned out that the gardener's son, Moses, was arrested on the streets of Alexandra for a technical pass law violation while on his way to the labour bureau "to join the queue of labour-seekers after a fruitless wait there on the previous day."⁶⁰⁶ The Black Sash member made inquiries to the NAD at Wynburg and discovered that Moses had been sent to a farm at Kendall because he had "volunteered" for farm labour.⁶⁰⁷ Reflecting her empathy with Moses' parents, the Black Sash member observed, "...although it was several days since the boy had been arrested, no attempt had been made to inform his relatives of his whereabouts and his mother had been unsuccessful in her attempts to obtain this information."⁶⁰⁸ The member contacted a Mr. Carlson whose name had appeared in the press as a lawyer interested in the "farm labour 'volunteer' scheme." Mr. Carlson arranged for Moses' mother to visit him at the farm where Moses told her that "he had not 'volunteered' for farm work and was most unhappy and wished to return home."⁶⁰⁹ Mr. Carlson demanded his release from the NAD and the farmer, "after some argument," agreed to return Moses to his home, driving him back to Wynburg two days later. Moses had been gone from home for 10 days. One of the aspects of the Farm Labour Scheme which offended the women of the Black Sash was that the scheme targeted teenagers who lived at home and had little experience with the pass law system.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid. The Southern Transvaal Regional Report does not name the Black Sash member or her gardener. The gardener's son was named in the memorandum submitted to the Commission of Enquiry. The Black Sash, Memorandum Submitted by the Southern Transvaal Region of the Black Sash to the Committee of Inquiry into Farm Labour (1959), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

Speaking as a mother, the Black Sash member reported, "This boy was lucky...others are not so fortunate."⁶¹⁰

Prior to press reports about Moses and other Africans who were "volunteered" into the scheme, many whites thought that the United Party government had abandoned the program to induct men arrested for petty offenses into involuntary farm labour in 1947.⁶¹¹ However, the Black Sash obtained a copy of the government Circular which proved that the current Farm Labour Scheme had been activated in 1954 by Dr. Verwoerd, the Secretary for Native Affairs, through an arrangement with Mr. Swart, the Minister of Justice and the Witwatersrand Police Commissioner.⁶¹² The press widely reported on the findings of the Black Sash investigation and the public outcry over the

⁶¹⁰Ibid. During her visit to the farm, Moses' mother discovered another teenager, Moses Mathebula, who was only 15 had been sent to the same farm after a run-in with the pass law system. Moses Mathebula had been instructed by letter to report to the pass office. When he lost the letter he was sent for a whipping and while walking home from the magistrate's court "after receiving four cuts" he was arrested for a "pass enquiry." He was then induced to "volunteer" for farm labour, the Black Sash noted, "without ever appearing in court." Mr. Carlson obtained his release as well. The Black Sash and Mr. Carlson reported the two cases to the *Johannesburg Star* which published a story about the two teenagers and the circumstances under which each one "volunteered" for farm labour. (Ibid.) When the delegation of Black Sash women gave evidence to the Commission of Enquiry, Mrs. Blaine told them of the cases of three more teenagers aged 15, 16, and 17 who were arrested at their homes in Alexandra Township, "handcuffed in front of their parents" and taken to the charge office despite production of temporary passes. The Black Sash, Report on Investigations into Farm Labour "Induced to Volunteer" As Laid Down in Native Affairs Department Circular No. 23 of 1954, (1959), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁶¹¹ See, Helen Bradford, "Getting Away with Murder: 'Mealie Kings', the State and Foreigners in the Eastern Transvaal, c. 1918-1950," in Bonner, Posel, and Delius, *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935-1962*, 96-125. Bradford examined the scheme to require African men convicted of petty pass law offenses to serve a term of involuntary servitude as labourers on white farms before the apartheid era. "Tropicals" (Africans born outside the northern borders of South Africa who entered the country without papers to find work) were specific targets of "recruitment" into Farm Labour.

⁶¹² Annexure "A" to the Black Sash Memorandum on "Volunteer" Farm Labour, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection MF: 2552 reel 1. The Farm Labour Scheme of 1954 differed very little from the earlier scheme. African men arrested for alleged "technical" pass law violations and "Tropicals" were detained until they could be taken "under escort" to the Labour Bureau where an employment officer advised them that if they "volunteered" for a farm labour contract of six month's duration, they would not be tried for their breach of the pass laws. If a man refused, he was often threatened with a large fine or long imprisonment even though sentences for technical violations did not exceed a small fine or one month in prison. Farmers paid a fee to the Labour Bureaux for these workers. Africans described the men who "volunteered" for farm labour as being "sold" to the farmers. "The Farm Labour Scheme," *The Black Sash* 3, no. 19 (June/July 1959), 17.

scheme moved the government to set up a Commission of Enquiry at which the Black Sash was invited to give evidence on 5 August, 1959.⁶¹³ The government, the farmers, and the South African Agricultural Union (SAAU) were embarrassed by the publicity and the reputation of the Black Sash was enhanced with some in the white community and more broadly within the black Community.

Although several regions in the Northern provinces were moving toward more sustained inter-racial collaboration to oppose apartheid, minutes of the National Council Meeting in June 1959 reveal that the delegates remained hesitant about alliances which required them to associate with radicals in the COD and the FSAW. Members unanimously passed a resolution approving continued investigation and activities related to the Farm Labour Scheme but they engaged in sharp debate over whether to continue Black Sash participation on the Bishop's Committee based on objections to associating with Communists. Mrs. Sinclair explained to the delegates that the purpose of the Bishop's Committee was to determine through consultation, whether there were areas where organizations could cooperate on matters of common interest.⁶¹⁴ The five members on the planning committee were Bishop Reeves, Mr. Oliver Tambo, Mrs. Sinclair, Mr. Ernie Wentzel, and Mr. Alex Hepple.⁶¹⁵ They met once per month to consider cooperation on specific projects and were cooperating with the Black Sash investigation into the Farm Labour Scheme. They were also considering a campaign for a

⁶¹³ The Black Sash, Southern Transvaal Regional Report, May 1959, 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶¹⁴ Secretary's Notes of National Council Meeting, June 1959, 18, Black Sash Society Papers. If any one group felt that they could not cooperate on a particular issue, the others would respect that decision and the decision would not be publicized. If any group wished to cooperate anonymously, they could do that as well.

⁶¹⁵ Secretary's Notes of National Council Meeting, June 1959, 19, Black Sash Society Papers.

minimum wage for Africans and a multi-racial protest over passes.⁶¹⁶ Mrs. Sinclair then told the delegates why she believed the Black Sash should remain on the Bishop's Committee. She said, "as long as Dr. Vorster is in charge, nothing will move the government one inch, and I feel we have failed with the white electorate. Our only hope is ...to cooperate with non-Whites...who might be prevented from going to extremes."⁶¹⁷ Mrs. Conroy agreed. She said, "We feel it is the UP who are our greatest enemy. When they come through the Transvaal they say, 'what is the Sash worth, only 150 members in Johannesburg; it shows how little the Sash means or can do.'"⁶¹⁸ Mrs. Dora Hill of the Southern Transvaal Region told the delegates that she felt cooperation with "non-European organizations is very vital because the initiative has passed out of our hands and I feel it is important that we show them sympathy and support."⁶¹⁹ She still supported a two-pronged approach. "That's one prong," she said, "the other is the active work we do...it exposes scandal of which this country should be ashamed."⁶²⁰ She had given up cooperating with the UP and told the other delegates, "A senior UP official said that if we go on with the Bishop Reeves Committee the UP would have to ask members to resign from the Black Sash. I feel we should just go on with what we can do and [the UP] must like it or lump it."⁶²¹ Mrs. Sinclair added, "I cannot see how the inclusion of the ANC is likely to turn the Black Sash Communist."⁶²² But Mrs. Foley was adamant. She said, "It seems to me that the COD... and the FSAW are at all times, unsuitable company for the

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Secretary's Notes of National Council Meeting, June 1959, 9, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶¹⁸ Secretary's Notes of National Council Meeting, 11, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶¹⁹ Secretary's Notes of National Council Meeting, June 1959, 11 Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Secretary's Notes of National Council Meeting, June 1959, 18 Black Sash Society Papers.

Black Sash. I do not think we should associate with them under any circumstance.”⁶²³ Mrs. Hill of the Natal-Coastal Region said there was fear and suspicion among members in her region about the COD. She wanted to know if “associating with these people meant sitting around the table discussing possible plans or organizing public protests with them.”⁶²⁴ After prolonged and passionate debate, the National Council voted to continue participation on the Bishop’s Committee by a vote of 17 In Favour; 1 Against; and 3 Abstentions.⁶²⁵ When the meeting on 9 June concluded, Mrs. Foley resigned from the Black Sash.⁶²⁶

“Various people have taken up various aspects of the work that has to be done...”

Despite immediate fears about the effect of Mrs. Foley’s resignation, there was no schism in the Black Sash—it seems there was too much to do.⁶²⁷ The Southern Transvaal Region broadened the activities associated with their investigation of the Farm Labour Scheme by setting up an action committee. Members in Johannesburg volunteered to interview African women searching for their loved ones, transport them to the labour bureaux and police offices, attend pass courts, debrief men after their release and provide a meal and clothing to men after they were released.⁶²⁸ Like the Bail Fund in the Cape Western Region, the action committee provided opportunities for women of the Southern

⁶²³ Secretary’s Notes of National Council Meeting, 19, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶²⁴ Secretary’s Notes of National Council Meeting, 23, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶²⁵ Secretary’s Notes of National Council Meeting, 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶²⁶ Secretary’s Notes of National Council Meeting, 26, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶²⁷ Mrs. Foley reconsidered her decision and asked to re-join the Sash the next month. She was welcomed back and reinstated to the Southern Transvaal Regional Committee but her participation was minimal.

⁶²⁸ The Black Sash, Southern Transvaal Regional Report, May 1959, 4, Black Sash Society Papers.

Transvaal Region to see for themselves the hardships imposed on Africans by pass laws and influx control.⁶²⁹ Bishop Reeves later provided a temporary office for the action committee to use and the Black Sash created a list of questions for volunteers to ask police, employment officers and magistrates.⁶³⁰

The June/July issue of *The Black Sash* was devoted entirely to the issue of passes for Africans.⁶³¹ The issue highlighted African voices and described in vivid detail African women's anti-pass protests during the previous October.⁶³² The June/July issue also described the bail funds in Cape Western and the Southern Transvaal as well as a day at the Langa Pass Court and included articles by church leaders who opposed passes.⁶³³

On 5 August, a delegation of women of the Black Sash appeared before the Commission of Enquiry to present evidence about the Farm Labour Scheme. In September, 1959 the government announced that it was suspending the program for "Union born Natives."⁶³⁴ As a result of the press publicity given to their ongoing investigation, their assistance to African women searching for their loved ones, and their contacts within the ANC through the Bishop's Committee, the women of the Black Sash gained a reputation among Africans around Johannesburg as people who were willing to help them deal with the problems which arose over application of the pass laws.⁶³⁵ By November, 1959 the Southern Transvaal Region maintained a roster of women who

⁶²⁹ Ibid..

⁶³⁰ The Black Sash, Suggested questions to be asked of Labour Bureaux, Police and Magistrates, (n.d.), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁶³¹ *The Black Sash* 3, no. 19 (June/July 1959): 1-24, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 3446 reel 5.

⁶³² "Passes and the Police," *The Black Sash* 3, no 19, 11-12, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶³³ "A Day at Langa and Nyanga," *The Black Sash* 3, no 19, 22-24, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶³⁴ *The Black Sash* III, no 23 (November 1959):8.

⁶³⁵ The Black Sash, Southern Transvaal Regional Report, May 1959, 3, Black Sash Society Papers.

regularly monitored the Pass Court at Fordsburg.⁶³⁶ Although it took the Southern Transvaal Region longer than the Western Cape Region of the Black Sash to attempt sustained collaboration with the ANC, ultimately a working relationship was established through the Bishop's Committee. As in the Cape Western Region, the Southern Transvaal Region's refusal to compromise the principles of political morality led to more sustained collaboration black South Africans. As women in the Southern Transvaal Region engaged in practical opposition to apartheid, many found a way to cross the racial divides that apartheid was intended to maintain. Their refusal to compromise the principles of political morality led them to engage in practical resistance by establishing a bail fund and monitoring the Pass Court at Fordsburg.⁶³⁷

Exposing the "often silent and hidden operations of gender" which Joan Wallach Scott contends are "nonetheless present and often defining forces in the operation of most societies," a close examination of the Southern Transvaal Regional Report of the Farm Labour Scheme in May 1959 shows how the women of the Black Sash moved between their domestic spheres and the public sphere of political activity."⁶³⁸ The initial interaction between the gardener and the Black Sash member occurred in the domestic sphere in which the Black Sash member's duties as a white, middle-class housewife

⁶³⁶ The Black Sash, Minutes of the Southern Transvaal Regional Committee, 25 November 1959, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1. Like defendants in the Langa Pass Court in Cape Town, Africans brought before the Pass Court at Fordsburg believed they were treated better when the white women of the Black Sash were present. The Black Sash, Minutes of Regional Committee Meeting, 20 October 1959, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁶³⁷ According to the National Conference Minutes in 1959 and 1960, the main obstacle to opening a bail fund in Johannesburg was lack of funds. However, various women in the Southern Transvaal Region provided advice on the Group Areas Act, residence permits and pass laws from their homes. Finally, in 1963 funds were available to open an Advice Office in Johannesburg. The Black Sash, Minutes of the National Conference at Johannesburg (2-4 November 1959); Minutes of the National Conference at Cape Town (31 October-2 November 1960), Black Sash Archival Collection.

⁶³⁸ Scott, *Gender and the politics of History*, 25.

involved supervising her African domestic employee and reveals the social hierarchy of race and class which regulated most inter-racial contacts in South Africa. But when the gardener asked for help to locate his son, differences of race and class did not prevent his employer from taking action because the circumstances of the situation offended her principles of political morality. Moreover, as a member of the Black Sash, the white, middle-class housewife was empowered to move out of the domestic sphere and into the public political discourse of the nation by raising a gendered moral voice of opposition to a scheme concocted by the white men who ran the country. The private sphere collided with the public political sphere and set in motion events which would force the Nationalist government to hold a Commission of Enquiry and abandon the Farm Labour Scheme for “Union born Natives.”⁶³⁹ The African gardener’s concerns raised through an employment relationship with a white woman in the domestic sphere were taken up by the Region and became a catalyst for broader action in the public sphere. Indeed, by the National Conference in October 1960, Noel Robb referred to the Black Sash as a “catalyst,” remarking, “This year our role as a ‘catalyst’ in the community stands out more clearly than ever before. It is not only our job to protest against unjust legislation or the implementation of it which is immoral... it is our job to see that something is done about it.”⁶⁴⁰ According to Mrs. Robb, the tiny size of the Black Sash in relation to the population of the country was not an insurmountable obstacle. She said, “Don’t think I

⁶³⁹ The Black Sash, Report on Proceedings at Interview Between Committee of Inquiry into Farm Labour and the Black Sash Delegation, 6 August 1959, Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁶⁴⁰ The Black Sash, Report of Cape Western Region Chair, Black Sash National Conference at Cape Town (31 October- 2 November 1960), Black Sash Archival Collection, Cape Western Region Archive: BC 668.A.4, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department.

am overestimating the Sash—a catalyst is usually present in a very tiny quantity. It is ever so tiny that it is hard to believe that it had any effect whatsoever in the reaction and yet we know that without it, no action could have taken place at all.”⁶⁴¹ As the May 1959 report to the Black Sash membership in May 1959 concluded, “...various people have undertaken various aspects of the work that has to be done.”⁶⁴²

In 1959, once the gardener involved his employer in the search for his son, the gardener passed out of the narrative of the Southern Transvaal Regional Report. Moses and his mother became the center of attention illustrating the focus of the Black Sash on women’s relationships to their families and the ways that women’s domestic concerns over the well-being of children became politicized. The Black Sash continued to monitor the detention of children and this became a source of recruitment of members in years to come. For example, Lucille Luckhoff, a member of the Cape Western Black Sash Regional Council during the 1980’s was recruited to the Black Sash by Noel Robb through her association in the Free the Children Alliance—a multi-racial alliance of women opposed to the detention of children which included the Black Sash.⁶⁴³

Over the years the practical work of the Black Sash facilitated interaction and empathy between women across racial divides and became a major focus of the Black Sash. Moreover, relationships in practical resistance activities between some white and black women did not remain static and hierarchal. As Tish Haynes recalled regarding her

⁶⁴¹ The Black Sash, National Conference at Cape Town (31 October – 2 November 1960), Report of the Cape Western Region Chair, Black Sash Archival Collection.

⁶⁴² The Black Sash, Investigations Into the Farm Labour Scheme (May 1959), Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1.

⁶⁴³ Lucille Luckhoff in personal conversation with the author, 5 August, 2009, Rondebosch, Cape Town.

experiences at Cowley House and in Dependent's Conference as a member of the Black Sash in the 1980's, "It was an insight for me to be meeting with the women because generally—the sisters, mothers, and wives [of political prisoners] gave me my political education."⁶⁴⁴ According to Lucille Luckhoff, personal relationships between white and black women and information shared at branch meetings as the result of practical resistance work by members of the Black Sash alleviated the sense of fear—a 1980's resurrection of the *swart gevaar* (black peril)—which permeated much of the white community in Cape Town. She recalled:

Because we had relationships with black people we weren't terrified of them...we knew the facts and this was important. Our children grew up not seeing us terrified. There was something to do—at least we were grasping the nettle. Other people were living in fear and they were being fed by the television and at least we knew what was happening on the ground, more or less, because the advice offices and our other activities were giving us information...the big thing with our own children was they were not brought up in fear even though there was a fair amount of exposure...you know standing on the curb [with a placard] knowing that your friend had to be in the car behind you. And some of us were visited by the Special Branch...the kids were aware of some of the dangers but they were not as afraid because they knew more about what was going on.⁶⁴⁵

The narrative of the 1959 Southern Transvaal Regional Report regarding the Farm Labour Scheme also illustrates the continued emphasis by the Black Sash on principles of political morality. Although the women were appalled by the harsh circumstances of the conditions under which farm labourers lived, they were particularly offended by the fact that the men were induced into a six month labour contract as a result of petty pass law

⁶⁴⁴ Tish Haynes in personal conversation with the author, 1 August, 2009.

⁶⁴⁵ Lucille Luckhoff in personal conversation with the author, 5 August 2009, Rondebosch, Cape Town.

offenses for which they were never tried. Moreover, the detainees were never apprised of the fact that punishment for petty pass law offenses involved a small fine of *L1* to *L5* or a term of imprisonment of less than a month.⁶⁴⁶ While the notion of political morality continued to inform Black Sash political ideology, once the Black Sash adopted the UDHR as a framework for political morality during the National Conference in 1960, public statements of the Black Sash referenced “justice” and “human rights.”⁶⁴⁷ However, the underlying principles of the notion of political morality—equality before the law, parliamentary democracy and fundamental liberties of freedom of speech, assembly worship and movement—remained the same.

Christian principles, Church associations and the mission Christian tradition of inter-racial consultation also continued to influence some members’ activities in the Black Sash. Margaret Nash became involved in the Black Sash through women she knew at St. Savior’s Church in Cape Town. Although Dr. Nash considered the Black Sash to be rather academic and she considered herself to be an activist, Dr. Nash recalled:

I didn’t work in the Advice Office because I was an activist and the other was---it wasn’t mobilizing people and some of us felt it was important to help people to subvert and to resist harassment by the government. I think the continuum from the advice offices to the protest stands to getting involved on the ground and people had different strategies—but on the whole the Black Sash was supportive of all the different strategies. It wasn’t a kind of ‘you shouldn’t be doing that’...My main focus was Church and inter-denominational ecumenical activity...A lot of the work we were doing was to try and get under the skin morally, without threatening [people] to prick their moral conscience...⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁶ Southern Transvaal Regional Report, May 1959, 2, Black Sash Society Papers.

⁶⁴⁷ The Black Sash, Minutes of the National Conference at Cape Town (31 October – 2 November 1960), 15, Black Sash Archival Collection, Cape Western Region Archive: BC 668.B.4, University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department.

⁶⁴⁸ Dr. Margaret Nash, in personal conversation with the author, 2 August 2009, Rondebosch, Cape Town.

The delegates to National Conferences after 1959 continued to examine the role of the Black Sash in the public political arena and their role in the broader struggle for liberation. Members continued to debate the issue of whether the Black Sash should concentrate on educating the white electorate or become more deeply involved in anti-apartheid resistance and the Black Sash continued to seek alliances with organizations across divides of race and class. The archives reflect that during the early months of 1960, the Black Sash moved to establish closer alliances with the ANC, the ANCWL and the Pan- Africanist Congress in the Cape. In the aftermath of Sharpeville and Langa, the women of the Black Sash were moved by their principles of political morality to become more deeply involved in the struggle for liberation, emphasizing their role as a catalyst for change.

6. Conclusion

The published histories of the Black Sash have created an official story of the organization which tends to reify them as a middle class group of white women whose activities, though well-meaning and sincere, were ultimately ineffective against the power of the racialized patriarchy of the white state. Some feminist histories of women in South Africa during the 1950's tend to confirm the official story because scholars compare the Black Sash with the FSAW and focus on the activities and writings of radical white women in the COD. These examinations also focus on the exclusivity of Black Sash membership before 1963, the privileged middle-class status of its members and do not examine the gendered nature of Black Sash liberalism articulated through the notion of political morality. Broader liberal historiography often ignores the Black Sash altogether.

Nomboniso Gasa has characterized women's history in South Africa as "...a constant struggle for self-identification, to change society and self and to define new values and forms of engagement."⁶⁴⁹ In that vein this thesis has sought to expand existing scholarship by examining the notion of political morality articulated by the Black Sash between 1955 and 1959 as a gendered adaptation of liberalism which was animated by motherisms and influenced by Christianity. As the white women of the Black Sash

⁶⁴⁹ Nomboniso Gasa, "*Basus'iimbokodo, bawel'imilambo* New freedoms and new challenges a continuing dialogue," in *Basus'iimbokodo, bawel'imilambo They remove boulders and cross rivers: Women in South African History*, xxxvii.

scrutinized the political and social structures of apartheid through the lens of political morality, they were confronted by the contradictions between their notion of political morality and the system of white supremacy on which their privileged status as white women in a white state depended. Refusing to compromise the principles of political morality or bow to patriarchal subordination by white political parties, the Black Sash adopted multiple strategies of resistance to the racialized patriarchy of apartheid. Strategic tensions within the Black Sash over the focus of the organization in 1957 and 1958 and the resulting schism over whether or not to obey the “Church Clause” of the NLAA resulted in an efflux of members but paved the way for a more cohesive strategy of practical resistance. Early inter-racial alliances with Africans in C.A.T.A.P.A.W. and the Bishop’s Committee to oppose the structures of influx control, practical resistance activities in the Bail Fund Office, and monitoring Pass Courts at Langa and Fordsburg enabled middle-class white women in the Black Sash to see for themselves the effects of apartheid on African women and their families. The three dimensions of the Programme of Action adopted in 1958 provided a framework for more dynamic resistance as each region became involved in educating the public through multi-racial public discussions in Brains Trusts and worked to alleviate the suffering caused by the application of influx control laws.

Dr. Margaret Nash aptly described the early leaders of the Black Sash as “tall trees who cast long shadows.”⁶⁵⁰ Their influence on the direction of the Black Sash in the years to come through fashioning a gendered notion of liberalism, animated by

⁶⁵⁰ Margaret Nash interviewed by Helen Scanlon 9 April 1999, quoted in Scanlon, *Representation and Reality*, 108.

motherism and influenced by Christianity is reflected in Jacklyn Cock's examination of the women's peace movement in South Africa.⁶⁵¹ Cock noted that although the peace movement did not have a "coherent centre in the social infrastructure for peace building...the Black Sash played a crucial role in peace building, often initiating other campaigns and organizations..."⁶⁵² Her brief description of Black Sash activities in the peace movement between 1983 and 1990 noted their emphasis on building alliances with other groups and their continued emphasis on raising a mother's moral voice in public political discourse.⁶⁵³ Oral testimonies by women who joined the Sash in the 60's, 70's and 80's also reflect the influence of early strategies to form inter-racial alliances, find out facts for themselves and engage in practical resistance activities.

This thesis has examined the role of the founder members of the Black Sash between 1955 and 1959 and their understanding of political morality during those years. Due to the dominant influence of the Johannesburg and Cape Town regions in strategic decisions about the direction of the Black Sash during its formative years, this thesis has focused on those regions. But as this thesis has shown, regional perspectives among the women in the Black Sash often clashed. Further research is necessary to reveal regional nuances of the notion of political morality among liberal white women and how they negotiated the notion of political morality locally. Over the years, as younger, more

⁶⁵¹ Jacklyn Cock, 'Another mother for peace': Women and peace building in South Africa, 1983-2003," in *Basus'iimbokodo, bawel'imilambo/They remove boulders and cross rivers: Women in South African History*, 257-280.

⁶⁵² Cock, 269.

⁶⁵³ Cock, 270. In fact, the slogan, "another mother for peace" was adopted by the Black Sash for a t-shirt sold at their annual "morning market" fund raisers. As noted earlier in this thesis, annual "morning markets" were a source of fund-raising and often an avenue of participation for the "silent sisterhood;" women who for whatever reason were unable to participate in public demonstrations.

militant women joined the Black Sash, earlier concerns about association with “Communists” and other radical political philosophies did not prohibit the Black Sash from welcoming new members. How did the voices of younger, more radical women change the focus and activities of the Black Sash and what impact did they have on the underlying principles of political morality?

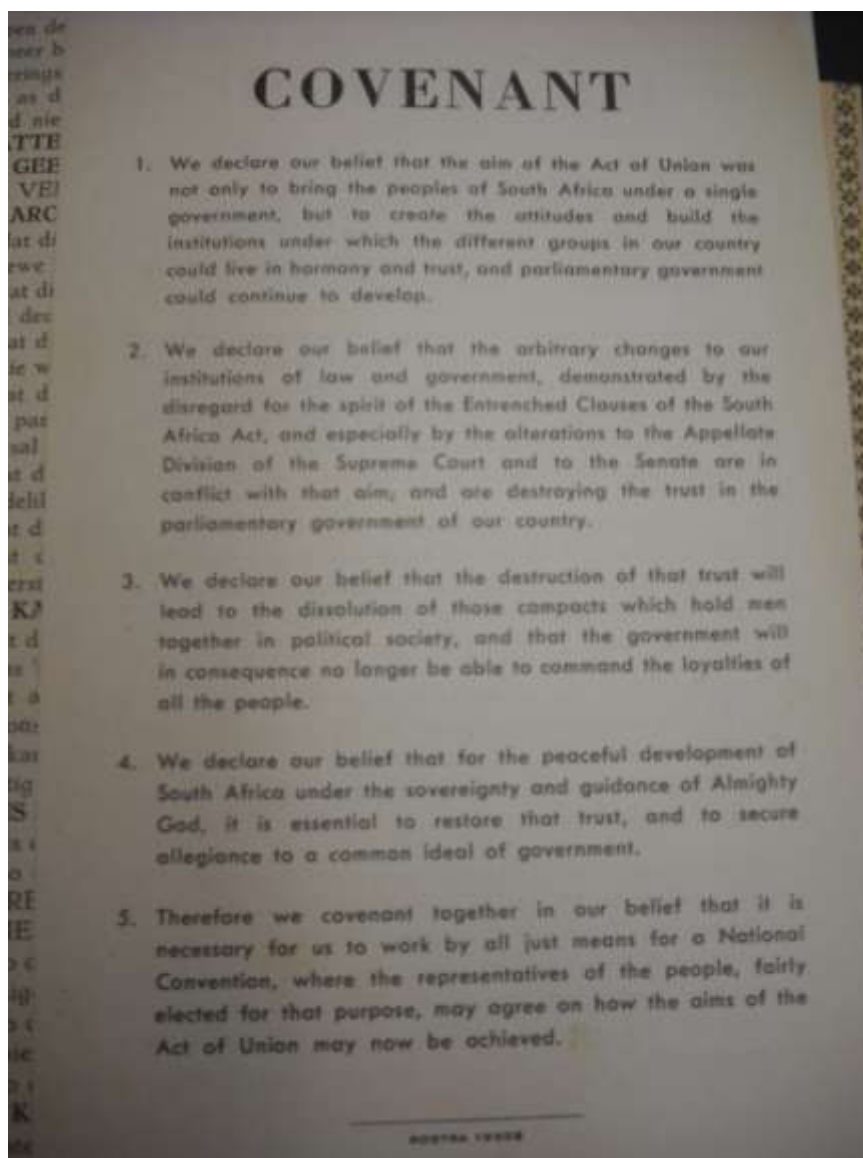
Finally, more comparative research is needed to understand the gendered meanings which women in South Africa adopted regarding their roles in society and their duties in the struggle for liberation and nation-building. Much of the historiography on women during the apartheid era tends to focus on one racial group of women or another and portrays women across binaries of victimhood and agency. However, as Caroline Wanjiku Kihato found in her study of women migrants in Johannesburg, “victimhood and agency are not mutually exclusive categories—these distinctions collapse and become intertwined when we listen to women’s narratives.”⁶⁵⁴ The Black Sash archives contain many narratives of interaction between white and black women as they came together in advice offices and inter-racial alliances to oppose apartheid over the years. What can these narratives tell us about the ways women articulated their identities, their ways of seeing each other, their diverse relationships to the state and their perspectives of the struggle for liberation? Narratives of women who came together in Advice Offices and inter-racial alliances as well as personal testimonies may reveal more complex meanings

⁶⁵⁴ Caroline Wanjiku Kihato, “Invisible lives, inaudible voices? The Social Conditions of migrant women in Johannesburg,” in Nomboniso Gasa, ed., *Basus’iimbokodo, bawel’imilambo/The Remove boulders and cross rivers: Women in South African History*.

of resistance, agency, self-identity, and forms of engagement which defy binaries as women negotiated social and political boundaries of gender, race and class.

APPENDIX A “Covenant”

Black Sash Archival Collection Noel Robb Papers BC 1092.B University of Cape
Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Archives Department



APPENDIX B
Letters between FSAW and the Black Sash used as evidence at the Treason Trial
(1957-61).
Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1

30th January 1957.

TO ALL REGIONAL SECRETARIES AND CHAIRWOMEN.

Dear Madam,

I am attaching for your information:-

- (a) A letter received by the Black Sash from the Federation of South African Women.
- (b) Our reply.

Apparently some concern has been expressed because of the statement in the newspaper that, during the course of the Treason Trials, it was stated that:-

"Sergeant Coetzee said that a letter from the Black Sash movement was also found during his search. It was written to the regional secretary of the South African Federation of Women and dealt with a demonstration held over the pass laws for Natives."

Letter from Federation of South African Women

Dear Friend,

The Transvaal Region of the Federation of South African women is holding a Provincial Conference on Sunday December 2nd, 1956 at the Gandhi Hall, 50 Fox Street, Johannesburg, starting at 9 a.m. Father Martin Jarrett-Korr, C.R., will open this Conference which has been convened to discuss the role of women of all races in the present critical situation in South Africa, when African women are being issued with passes, when arbitrary powers of banishment have been given to local authorities, when Indian, Coloured and African women are threatened with the loss of their homes and their security under the proclamations of the Group Areas Act.

You will recall the magnificent demonstration of 20,000 women of all races to the Union Buildings on August 9th, 1956. The women who took part in this historic protest will send their delegates to discuss the part which women must play in the coming months of struggle against the Nationalist Government and the increasing oppressive legislation which attacks, and in so many instances destroys, the rights and liberties of the people of South Africa, white as well as non-white.

The women of the Black Sash have on so many occasions demonstrated the courage and determination of the women to oppose the immoral Acts of the Nationalist Government; your stand against the Senate Act has inspired women, not only in South Africa, but throughout the world. Your declaration that the women of the Black Sash will oppose all attempts to diminish democratic rights is a further inspiration to those who are struggling for true democracy, and we are confident therefore that the extension of passes to women, the vicious provisions of banishment under Section 29 of the Urban Areas Act, and the inhuman onslaught upon Indian Coloured and African families, through the recent proclamation of the

W/42.

Group/.....

Group Areas Act have already received the attention of your organisation.

Although your organisation is precluded from participation in demonstrations of other organisations we recall with pleasure that individual members of the Black Sash accompanied the women to Pretoria on August 9th.

The Federation of South African Women, representing women of all races, invites your organisation to send delegates to this important conference of women; if your organisation should be unable to send delegates, observers will be most welcome, or failing official observers, individual women in their personal capacity.

As women from all areas of the Transvaal have been invited to attend this Conference, we shall appreciate it if our invitation to the Black Sash women can be conveyed to other Regions as well as to Johannesburg.

Your organisation is also invited to send fraternal greetings to the Conference.

Yours sincerely,

(signed) Helen Joseph,
REGIONAL SECRETARY.

Reply from the Black Sash.

Dear Mrs. Joseph,

The Central Executive of the Black Sash have asked me to stress again that while we are deeply sympathetic with what is being suffered, and with any organisation concerned with wrongs caused by the diminution of rights, in terms of our constitution we cannot associate the Black Sash with any other organisation.

Your letter has, however, been brought to the attention of the members, and although our organisation is precluded from participation in demonstrations of other organisations, there is no reason why interested members should not give more active support.

Yours sincerely,
(signed) R.A. Dietrich,
Hon. Secretary.
Central Executive.

R. A. DIETRICH.
HON. SECRETARY CENTRAL EXECUTIVE.

APPENDIX C
Notice to Homeowners to Register Female Domestic Servants
Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 3

NATIVE COMMISSIONER,
P.O. Box 7758,
JOHANNESBURG.

To The Occupier,
.....
.....

Sir/Madam,

(1) The Registration of Native females in terms of Act No. 67 of 1952, in the District of Johannesburg, has commenced on the 15th October, 1958.

(2) Will you kindly send your Native female servant to the Police Station on in order that she may be registered on the Native Population Register and issued with a reference book.

(3) In the event of unavoidable circumstances preventing you from sending your servant in on this date will you please send her to obtain her reference book on a day as near as possible to the date mentioned above.

(4) Your servant should bring with her the reference book of her husband and if she is not married that of her parent or guardian in order that part "D" of the reference book can be completed. If this book is not available or cannot be easily obtained, your female servant should still be registered. Part "D" of the reference book can then be completed at a later date.

(5) Your co-operation in these matters as well as in sending your servant in as early in the morning as possible to avoid unnecessary absence from work will be appreciated.

(6) I might add that should it be more convenient to send your female Native servant to the Native Commissioner's Office in Market Street (corner of Bezuidenhout Street) for registration, you are at liberty to do so as reference book for both Native females as well as for Native males will also be issued at this centre.

(7) Your servant should bring 5/6 with her, being 2/- for the photograph and 1/6 for a wallet.

Yours faithfully,

T.D. YOUNG.

NATIVE COMMISSIONER : JOHANNESBURG.

APPENDIX D
"Suggested Questions to Magistrates"
Black Sash Society Papers CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 5

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO MAGISTRATES.

1. What are his duties in connection with the "volunteer" farm labour scheme?
2. Do you inspect the farms of those farmers who apply for this labour force, before recommending them to the N.A.D.?
3. To whom do you send applications for labour required in your district?
4. Do you inspect regularly the conditions under which labourers work and live on the farms you have recommended?
5. Do you work with the District Surgeon in checking hygiene and health of these volunteer workers?
6. If a labourer breaks his contract by escaping are you notified? Do you take any action to recover the labourer for the farmer?
7. Is the contract therefore of so little importance that no effort is made to find escapees and ensure that they complete their contracts?
8. When applications are made to individual farmers for the return of volunteers are you notified?
9. If you knew that Juveniles were being sent to some farms would you consider it your duty to inform the N.A.D. that they must be returned to their parents? Do you in fact know that many juveniles are sent to the farms under this voluntary labour scheme?
10. Is your participation in this scheme confined to recommending that certain farmers should be supplied with labour?

APPENDIX E
"Suggested Questions to be Asked at Police Stations"
Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED AT POLICE STATIONS.

1. Is it a fact that the Farm Labour Scheme aims at offering employment to unemployed natives roaming about in urban areas who are arrested for offences of a technical nature?
2. Are members of the Force, both White and non-White, uniform and plain-clothes, aware of this fact?
3. Why is it that people are arrayed in the streets of their own Township, and also in their homes? Also, why is it that employed people are also arrested?
4. Who is arresting juveniles in their homes in the presence of their parents?
5. If relatives ask for information as to the whereabouts of their people are you not in duty bound to supply that information?
6. Does the South African Police work in close collaboration with the Peri-Urban offices in the district?
7. If not, how does it happen that people who have, on a particular day been to the Peri-Urban offices to seek work, or work permits, or residential permits, have within 24 hours or less been arrested, usually by plain-clothes men, for offences against the relevant regulations, or just for "Reference Book Enquiry", and then sent to N.A.D. for farm labour? Is it coincidence?
8. Why is it that people arrested for an offence are not charged and tried in Court?
9. What happens to those arrested after 2 p.m. on Fridays?
10. Is Saturday morning the only day on which people arrested for petty offences appear in Court?
11. Before handing over batches of arrestees to the N.A.D. do you check their ages, or whether they are in fact in employment?
12. Who asks the arrestees whether they wish to appear in Court or go to the farms? Is this done before they are sent to the N.A.D.?
13. Why is the word "sold" used to arrestees and their relatives by both Police and N.A.D.?
14. Does any money in fact change hands to account for this term?

APPENDIX F
"Suggested Questions for Use at Labour Bureaux and Native Commissioners' Offices"
Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection MF 2552 reel 5

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR USE AT LABOUR BUREAUX AND
 NATIVE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICES.

1. Where do these people come from - Police, Peri-urban, N.A.D.?
2. How are they sent to Court?
3. Why are they brought to Labour Bureau? Why not kept in Police cells until charged and tried for the offence they are alleged to have committed? If no offence, why were they arrested?
4. Do the Police act as recruiting agents for Labour Bureaux?
5. How do Labour Bureau officials decide where to send these arrestees?
6. Who puts question about work on farms in preference to jail or fine?
7. Is each individual asked separately?
8. Is it explained to them what the maximum penalty is that they could expect to receive for their offence?
9. What inducements are used to persuade them to volunteer?
10. What arrangements are made to contact relatives once arrestees have volunteered for farm labour?
11. What arrangements are made to notify employers when people are arrested under this scheme and induced to volunteer for farm labour? Is it not supposed to be applied to unemployed natives? Circular 23 says so specifically.
12. How is labour allocated from amongst those who have volunteered?
13. Who removes them to the farms to which they are allocated?
14. Could we see contract document which we understand each person "signs"? May we have a copy of a blank form?
15. Are the terms of the contract explained to each individual or in batches? Is their own language used? What officials are present when these contracts are explained and "signed"?
16. Once these people are on the farms, what control does the N.A.D. have over them or their employer?
17. When a volunteer's time is up does the N.A.D. see to it that he is returned to his home, and has received his pay?
18. In the case of foreign natives, who, we are told, are offered the chance to return home, are they allowed to get any money they may have in order to pay their fare home?
19. Are they kept in cells until put on the first possible train?
20. Are they under escort on the train? Are they seen across the border?
21. Are there in fact any safeguards against the illegal immigrants jumping the train and remaining in the Union?
22. Is there any provision made for notifying his family or employer that he is being deported or sent to work on the farms?
23. Is he in fact an undesirable person to have around only when he is not working on a farm?

24. Is the relevant Commissioner for the territory concerned notified of the arrest, deportation or sojourn on the farms of his subjects?
25. Is he allowed facilities to inspect the farms on which his subjects are working?
26. Is it a fact that if a foreign native escapes from a farm to which he has been sent, he is virtually a hunted refugee, as his papers are not in order, and if he tries to get them put in order he is likely to be arrested for desertion from the farm?
27. Is there anything to prevent foreign natives from entering the Union?

APPENDIX G
Resignation of Ruth Foley
Black Sash Society Papers, CAMP Collection: MF 2552 reel 1

COPT.

36, The Valley Road,
Westcliff,
Johannesburg.
5th May, 1959.

To the Chairman and Members of the Southern Transvaal Regional Committee. Copy
to the President and Members of the Central Executive.

CONFIDENTIAL.

Dear Mrs. Sinclair,

I am writing as a member of the Central Executive but my views do not
express the C.E.'s views and I have not discussed this matter with any-body.

During my illness I have been unable to read Minutes. I learnt,
therefore, through a newspaper report of the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee
sponsored by the Bishop of Johannesburg and that this Committee includes
representatives of the Congress of Democrats and the Black Sash.

I look upon the association of the Black Sash with the C.O.D. as a
matter of very grave importance to all members of our movement.

In my opinion it is very wrong of us to allow our name to be linked with
that of an organisation whose motives and activities are suspect, not only by a
common repute but also by our own often reiterated judgement. I feel too that
it is quite unfair to our many members who are not familiar with the activities
of the C.O.D.

The Black Sash's primary cause is political morality. This cause must
at all times supersede every other consideration because it is the essence of our
work, our appeal and our opposition to present governmental policies. We must
remember also that we have preached it throughout South Africa in every form
open to us.

To me, therefore, it seems an impossibility to justify, let alone explain,
our sudden alliance with people whose policies and activities we deplore.

I know that your acceptance of their presence on the Ad Hoc Committee
is based on awareness of the need that exists for reputable European organisations
to exert as much influence as possible upon non-White opinion. Personally I
approve of this motive though I have great doubts as to how much it is understood
by the majority of our members.

Mrs. Foley: Correspondence:

But in allying ourselves with the C.O.D. are we not, from the very outset, defeating this object? In this alliance we are, in fact, telling the world that we approve of the C.O.D. thus giving sanction and encouragement to what we ourselves are pledged to resist.

The alternatives, at this juncture, are I know difficult to carry out but, I believe the Black Sash has a great part to play in the history of South Africa and that, mindful of this, we cannot justify so un-natural an alliance.

To me, the only way of justifying it would be to publish openly our disapproval of the C.O.D. and the reasons for our participation in the Bishop's Committee. I flinch from such a course and therefore believe that it would be best simply to say that we cannot remain on the Committee with them.

With best wishes to all of you,

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) Ruth Foley,

Vice-President.

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