

1990S: WOMEN BEFORE AND AFTER THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTION

THE PRE-ELECTION PERIOD

In 1990 the first glimmers of a new more democratic South Africa were evident. The African National Congress (ANC) and other organizations were unbanned and political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, were released. Talks about power-sharing were held between the Apartheid government and leaders of the ANC.

However, violence escalated in the 1990 to 1994 period. More than 700 people died violently in the first eight months of 1990. The economy was in shreds and there was still no real constitutional reform that would give black people any meaningful say in government. President FW de Klerk realized that reform had to take place. In the March 1992 referendum for the white electorate, De Klerk was given the mandate to bring about change.

Negotiations had been initiated in May 1990 at Groote Schuur, Cape Town and were followed by the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) I and II. At this stage, women activists began to return to South Africa to take up senior political posts and make an active contribution in the progress towards democracy.

In 1990, for example, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi returned from exile at the request of the South African Communist Party (SACP) to assist with re-launching of the SACP after it was unbanned. Some other women that returned to South Africa include Phyllis Naidoo, Ruth Mompati, Shanthivathie (Shanthie) Naidoo, singer Miriam Makeba and trade unionist Ray Alexander.



Members of the Food and Canning Workers Union awaiting the arrival of Ray Alexander from exile. Ray Alexander was the former General Secretary of the organisation and one of the founding members of the women's federation. Cape Town. 1990. Source: Omar Badsha.



Returned exiles and veterans of the South African Communist Party at the launch of the SACP, Gugulethu, Cape Town. 1992. Source: Omar Badsha.



Members of the ANC and its allies protest against state sponsored violence in Natal. Cape Town. 1993. Source: Omar Badsha.



PHYLLIS NAIDOO

1928 -

In 1958 Phyllis Naidoo married MD Naidoo, a committed member of the South African Communist Party (SACP). She began working with her husband and Govan Mbeki to aid people underground by making deliveries and assisting those in danger to get out of the country. In 1961 Phyllis joined the SACP.

She was banned and under house arrest from 1966 until 1976. She qualified as a lawyer in 1973 but could not practice, as she was not allowed in court. When her banning order was lifted, she set up her practice.

In 1977 Phyllis escaped to Lesotho, and joined ANC. She helped children who had left South Africa, and assisted others to escape from South Africa.

While in Lesotho, Phyllis was Chief Legal Aid Counsel for the Lesotho Government. After warnings that the South African

government were trying to kill her, she fled to Zimbabwe.

In Zimbabwe she continued her political activities for the ANC's Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). She returned to South Africa in 1990.

Phyllis Naidoo has written a number of books about her experience of the struggle.



Phyllis Naidoo, Durban, 2002. Source: Gisele Wulfsohn.

ANC WOMEN'S LEAGUE

The ANC formed the Women's League in 1943. In 1954 a multi-racial organisation, the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), was established. The ANC Women's League (ANCWL) made up FEDSAW's largest component.

The ANCWL was banned from functioning by the Apartheid regime after 1960. Women still continued their resistance through new legal organisations or underground structures. The Women's Section of the ANC played an active role abroad. Heads of the ANC's Woman's Section included Florence Mophosho and Gertrude Shope.

After the unbanning of the ANC, the ANCWL was re-launched in Durban. The launch took place on 9 August 1990, the anniversary of the famous women's anti-pass march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in 1956.

In April 1991 the first National Conference of the ANC Women's League (ANCWL), inside the country, took place in Kimberley. The first National Executive Committee was elected after the adoption of the constitution. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Albertina Sisulu were elected to the National Executive Committee of the ANC and Gertrude Shope became the president of the ANCWL. Gill Marcus was given the important task of training ANC media workers and voter educators prior to the 1994 elections. She also accompanied Nelson Mandela on his election campaign.

The second conference of the ANC Women's League took place in Durban in December 1993. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela was elected President, with Thandi Modise as Deputy President and Nosiviwe Mapisa-Ngcakula as Secretary General. In 1997 Winnie Madikizela-Mandela was re-elected as President and in 2003 Nosiviwe Mapisa-Ngcakula took over this position. In 2008 Angie Motshekga was elected ANCWL president, a position she still holds today.



RUTH MOMPATI

1925 -

Ruth Mompoti was born outside Vryburg, Western Transvaal. She obtained her Primary School Teaching Diploma in 1944 and starting teaching at local schools. Mompoti joined the North West District Teachers' Union. In the late 1940s she began to have contact with the local branch of the ANC in Mafikeng. In 1952, Mompoti married Peter Matswane and moved to Orlando West. Her husband was a member of the ANC and Mompoti also became a member. Mompoti went to a private school to study shorthand and typing and got a job at Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo's law firm.

Mompoti became part of the ANC Women's League and assisted in launching the Federation of South African Women

(FEDSAW) in 1954 and in organising its anti-pass protest on 9 August 1956. During the State of Emergency in 1960, she was instructed by Walter Sisulu to go underground. A week after the State of Emergency was lifted Mompoti was arrested but was released three days later. In 1962, Mompoti left South Africa and worked for the ANC in Tanzania and was elected a member of the ANC's NEC and formed part of the President's Office of the ANC.

Between 1981 and 1982, Mompoti served as the chief representative of the ANC in the United Kingdom. She became part of the delegation that opened talks with the South African government at Groote Schuur in 1990. In 1994, Mompoti was elected a Member of Parliament in the National Assembly. She became Ambassador to Switzerland from 1996, and when she returned in 2000, she became Mayor of Vryburg in the North-West Province.

WOMEN'S NATIONAL COALITION

Soon after the unbanning of the ANC and its structures towards the end of 1990, the ANC Women's League approached all the women's organisations to set up a coalition. Seventy organisations joined and the Women's National Coalition (WNC) was formed in April 1991 and officially launched in April 1992.

The task of this coalition was to research, co-ordinate, and draw up a Women's Charter based on the priorities and concerns of women from all walks of life throughout the country. The Charter was completed in 1994 and accepted at a national convention held in February 1994. It was handed over to the State President, Nelson Mandela, in Parliament on 9 August 1994. 9 August was declared 'National Women's Day'. The issues of concern to women that were listed in this Women's Charter were then incorporated into the new constitution and the Bill of Rights.

The Women's National Coalition now focuses on training for parliamentary and local government candidates and community leaders, and plays a key role in adult basic education and gender training.



DOROTHY NYEMBE

1931–1998

Dorothy Nyembe was born near Dundee in Natal where she attended a local mission school until Standard 9 (Grade 11). She joined the ANC in 1952, and participated as a volunteer in the Defiance Campaign in Durban. She was imprisoned briefly on two occasions. In 1954 she assisted in establishing the ANC Women's League in Cato Manor and became the Chairperson of the 'Two Sticks' Branch Committee. In 1956 Nyembe was elected Vice-President of the Durban ANC Women's League and led the Natal contingent of the anti-pass protest on 9 August 1956. Three years later she became the President of the ANC Women's League in Natal.

Nyembe was recruited into Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in 1961 and as President of the Natal Rural Areas Committee, a year later, she led what became known as the Natal Women's Revolt. In 1963, Nyembe was arrested and sentenced to three years for furthering the aims of the banned ANC. She was detained again in 1968, after working underground, with ten others and sentenced to 15 years for harbouring members of the MK. After her release in 1984, Nyembe became involved in the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) a community organisation fighting against rent increases, transport costs, poor education and lack of child care facilities. In the late 1980s she received the USSR People's Friendship Award.

In 1992, Nyembe was awarded the Chief Albert Luthuli Prize for her commitment and dedication to the liberation struggle. After the 1994 elections she became a member of the National Assembly. Nyembe died at her home in Umlazi on 17 December 1998.



Dorothy Nyembe after her release. She spent 15 years in prison for ANC activities. Kwa Mashu, Durban, 1984. Source: Omar Badsha.



Desmond Tutu and Antjie Krog (with her team of journalists) at a TRC hearing. Antjie Krog is a journalist, writer and award-winning poet. She covered the TRC hearings and wrote about the experience in *Country of my Skull* (1998) for which she received the Alan Paton Award, the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation Award and the Olive Schreiner award. *Photograph by George Hallett, supplied by African Media Online.*

POST 1994 PERIOD

THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC GENERAL ELECTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

On 27 April 1994, South Africans formed long queues at polling stations throughout the country. A spirit of goodwill prevailed and all violence, contrary to expectations, came to a halt.

The result was a landslide victory for the ANC; it gained 62,65% of the vote and proved to be not only the most popular party, but also the only party to have countrywide support. The ANC held 252 of the 400 seats in the National Assembly. Nelson Mandela, as the leader of the ANC, became the new President of South Africa.

Before 1994, women constituted 2,7% of Members of Parliament. In the 1994 elections, Women won 111 out of 400 (27%) seats in the National Assembly, while in the Provincial Legislatures women comprised 24% out of a total of 425 members. This meant that the combined total of women in government in South Africa was 26,2% compared to the global average of 11% at the time.

Women became more prominent in the diplomatic service which bears out the terms of the Women's Charter that there should be no discrimination on the basis of gender.. This is a far cry from the days under the minority White government when Helen Suzman stood alone as a woman in Parliament.



TOWARDS CHANGE

After the 1994 elections, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up. The Commission investigated what happened during the Apartheid era from 1960 to 1994. They heard testimonies from all members of South African society about political crimes, violence and human rights abuses that had not been disclosed. In theory the commission was empowered to grant amnesty to those charged with atrocities during Apartheid as long as certain conditions were met. Statements were heard by more than 20 000 people, including women. 5 392 people were refused amnesty and 849 were granted amnesty, but no women applied for amnesty.

On 28 October 1998 the Commission presented its report to the State President, Nelson Mandela. The report condemned both sides for committing atrocities. The TRC was a crucial component of the transition to full and free democracy in South Africa.

In 1996, a new constitution, with provision for women's rights, was introduced along with a Commission for Gender Equality. This marked a turning point for women in South Africa and aided in empowering women in many ways in the late 1990s.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Read the following extracts about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and then answer the questions below.

Extract 1

"Retributive justice is largely western. The African understanding is far more restorative not so much to punish as to redress or restore a balance that has been knocked askew. The justice we hope for is restorative of the dignity of the people."
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu, during the TRC proceedings

Extract 2

These words were said during the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by Mrs Cynthia Ngewu whose son, Christopher Piet was killed by the Security Police in 1986. In response to the plea of forgiveness from the man who killed her son, she said:

"This thing called reconciliation ...if I am understanding it correctly ... if it means this perpetrator, this man who has killed

Christopher Piet, if it means he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back ... then I agree, then I support it all."

- Source: TRC Report 1998b: 451

Questions:

1. Explain the difference between restorative and retributive justice.
2. What did Mrs Cynthia Ngewu mean in Extract 2?
3. Do you agree with her sentiments? Explain your answer.
4. Discuss with your class your feelings about restorative justice and the work of the TRC.