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# Evolution or devolution? The status of the South African women's movement in a post-colonial trajectory

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**Abstract**
This article explored the evolution of the South African women's movement in a post-colonial dispensation since 1994. Women's inclusion is dated as far back as the 1913's when women protested against the pass laws in the Orange Free State and can be connected to the success of overcoming the apartheid regime. The article argues that the agency of women in formal political structures has been largely downplayed, with women still being underrepresented as decision takers. In the aftermath of democratic transition, the women's movement has weakened, in comparison to their inclusion and active status under the apartheid regime. This is primarily because the South African women's movement cannot be categorised into representing one women's group or one constituency of women. The South African women's movement was centred on diversity and included a number of women's organisations and the interests that were driven by the diverse women facing multiple intersectional challenges. The women that formed part of the women's movement were categorised into those that focused on eradicating the apartheid regime and tackling every day challenges women faced related to the grassroots needs of their communities. Through a conceptual analysis, this study explores the idea of a women's movement through the groupings of political structures of the state and political parties. There is also not enough literature on post-liberation, and democratic transition periods and the relationships between women and political parties, as this has been studied in more industrialised developed states. As such, gender equality is largely dependent on the presence of an active and autonomous women's movement, aligned to a strong agenda driven within equal and inclusive structures to ensure an evolutionary, women's movement representing the needs of their constituency.

**Key words:** Women's movements, South Africa, gender inequality, inclusion, post-colonial context

## Introduction

The South African post-colonial context and the women's movement remain unique topics of exploration due to the historical efforts of women in organising against the apartheid regime and its ramifications. It was during the transition period of South Africa that women's organisations attempted to unite diverse women's group in an effort to form a robust women's movement (Hassim, 2005; Meintjes, 1996). At the time, these women represented a strong women's base; as a result of their position and inclusion in the transition and negotiation process, this was an ideal opportunity for their agenda and demands to be considered, in the dawn of a new democratic dispensation (Viterna & Fallon, 2008). Notably, the lack of evolving the women's movement during this opportune time led to its mandate weakening (Albertyn, 1994).

The main success of the South African women's movement was articulated in a long unwavering history of the women's movement, through their involvement in trade unions in the 1940s and in also bringing the

needs of communities to the discussion table during South Africa's democratic transition (Cock, 1985) (Healy-Clancy, 2017). Coincidentally, as highlighted by Ruth Mompati (Britton, 2005, 65), the women's movement thrived under the apartheid regime due to the commitment by men and women to work together for a common cause. Both genders did not really have a choice because they needed to work together to terminate the viciously violent oppressive apartheid regime. Mompati (Britton, 2005) further highlights how in the postliberation period these very men who worked alongside the women to eradicate the apartheid regime suggested gender a point of concern in order to side-line women. Women's issue were often downplayed, and it was suggested there there were more important matters that required the attention of the state.

Consequently, under the apartheid regime, the state was considered a threat to women's organisations (Hassim & Walker,1992) and in the post liberation years this has not improved due to the limited support, engagement and continued estranged relationship with women's groups (Hassim, 2002). Inevitably, this impacted on the women's movement; as a result, women under the first democratic tenure can be seen to not have had substantiative citizenship in state institutions as women's agency continues to reside with civil groups (Hassim 2005) and still remain underrepresented in local government. Women particularly remain underrepresented at the ward level and as leaders, lagging as decision makers (Musetsho et al, 2021).

The challenge in South Africa, with nationalist movements was that the leaders failed to acknowledge women's oppression both under colonial rule and patriarchy (McClintock, 1991; Duff, 2021). This need for gender equity was a process that was meant to unfold within the auspices of the liberation movement for many of its leaders and explains why women continue to remain perplexed by patriarchy and its modus operandi. However in the 1990s, the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) acknowledged that women's issues needed to be discussed and attended to within the organisation and society at large (Mohanan, 2021; Maharaj & Jordan, 2021). As such, according to Geisler (2004, 64), this created space for women to drive the feminist agenda alongside commendable policy driving women's issues and agenda.

In exploring just how effective state institutions have been in advancing gender parity in a post-colonial context, Meintjes (2008) argues that even though many claim the South African Constitution (1996) and gender legislation embraced gender equity, in practice it focused on non-racialism and greater awareness, overlooking women's challenges (Musetsho et al, 2021). Meintjes (2008) further suggests that the coordination that occurred between women's groups and organisations created an unusual coalition, as an act of pressure to deliver a diversified Constitution, aiming to cater for the needs of a mass population and unequal society. This was through the Women's National Coalition (WNC) formed in 1992 encompassing multiculturalism as it includes peoples from diverse races, social structures and with differing world views (Salo, 2018; Lemon, 2001).

Women are the ones who often benefit from democratic transitions as this is seen as an opportune time for them to voice their concerns and needs (Hassim, 2002). In the case of South Africa, the instituting of democracy itself was not as important as reforming political institutions, legislation and the prevailing worldview at the time, such as the eradication of the institutionalisation of apartheid in South Africa (Viterna & Fallon, 2008). Regardless of the organising and participation of South African women and feminists in the transition process and in steering change, the key question and exploration of this study focuses on whether the reform required within state institutions have impacted on the feminist's agenda connected to the challenge of women's underrepresentation and inclusion in political institutions.

The inconsistencies of South African women's advances regarding the women's movement remains linked to the role in which women played during the liberation struggle and why they participate and how they choose to do so. Britton (2005, 5) notes that this trajectory which occurred during colonialism and in the post-colonial era is linked to the power, agency and the identity of women. In order to explore the idea of a women's movement and their aim to advance gender equality, the disconnect that exists in the understanding of women's mandate in women's organisation and political institutions form the basis of this study. In South Africa, women presumed that state institutions remained accountable to them regarding driving gender parity at an institutional level (Geisler, 2004). Meanwhile, the institutions that continued to remain male dominated, suggested the matters that women brought to the discussion table were irrelevant

and unimportant for discuss at that level. These men implied that womens issues could have been resolved amongst the women themselves (Meintjes, 2008). For many in South Africa gender parity meant reaching quotas of at least 30% and currently towards 50% or ticking the boxes linked to Affirmative Action (AA). This was depicted by the Commission of Gender Equality (CGE) (2016) considering that there are not robust gender programmes in many privately owned and public organisation in South Africa's post-colonial context.

Thus, the South African gendered project, cannot be examined without evaluating the political party representation of women, and how women's representation in the political sector as a whole impact on driving women's issues through policy and meeting the needs of their respective constituencies.

In recent years, the equal representation and inclusion of women into formal political structures both within the state and political parties has been largely downplayed, with women still being underrepresented in decision taking processes. Thus, through a conceptual analysis, this article explores the idea of a women's movement in South Africa, through the groupings of political parties and the state. The article also argues that gender equality is largely dependent on a robust women's movement, aligned to strong representation and a strategic agenda which ensures an evolutionary, autonomous women's movement free from the influence of the state and other social movements.

## The notion of a women's rights movement in South Africa: Organising in a post-colonial dispensation

### *Prior to 1994*

South Africa's success in ensuring greater inclusivity, fairness and the acknowledgement of women's issues can be connected to the inclusion of women in spearheading the mass movement as highlighted by Jenny Schreiner as former ANC MP (Geisler, 2004). Hence, it becomes important to understand the difference between women's movements and feminist movements. Baldez (2003, pp. 255) argues that "women's movements emerge as a function of some combination of resources, framing and opportunities". Furthermore, Paxton et al. (2007) argues that feminist movements are also a type of women's movement. Women's transitional mobilisation can be said to be connected to women's movements and the idea of a particular type of social movement that is founded on a female collective and political organising action, where women are mobilised as the primary constituency base (O'Rourke, 2013).These groups can be local, national , international and constitute of a number of women's groups and clubs, focusing on mobilising in order to drive women's interests, ensuring their independence from the state (Tripp, 2010).

Under the apartheid regime, women primarily focused on eradicating the regime through political alliances, organisational formations; and women also set the foundation for grassroots democracy (Hassim, 2006). It was a difficult endeavour for these women's organisations who further aimed to build autonomy within male-dominated institutions and structures (Gaitskell & Unterhalter, 1989; Walker, 1991). Despite encountering a number of hurdles that these organisations remained confronted with, they showed their solidarity and commitment to support non-racialism in the move towards an inclusive society free form oppression and human rights abuses (Hassim & Walker, 1993).

Historically, women's activism grew in civic movements mainly in the townships and included women of colour from the African, Coloured and Indian racial groupings (Britton et al., 2009). The focus was to propel change through mass-based transformation that erupted from the grassroots up. What remains so unique about these political organisations at the time, is that they were people driven and not elitist driven (Hassim, 2006, 48). Hence, the agendas of the political parties encompassed the needs of the mass population. This also explains why women remained focused on liberation and ending apartheid, as the challenges they faced back then were primarily linked to minority-led violent racial oppression that needed to be overcome. Hence racial inequality and exclusion for the mass population needed to be reversed, even before feminist ideology could gain ground in a society so fragmented by race, class and gender. This therefore crafted a solid foundation for the inclusion of the masses and the notion of democracy was consciously presented at this level (Badri & Tripp, 2017; De Haan et al., 2012). In understanding the ideals of the women's movement which largely focussed on "motherism" and remaining connected to the

grassroots communities and the resistance movement. It is worth noting that the women's organisations and method of mobilisation was different to the ANC Guerrilla Warfare which was military focused, or the Black Consciousness Movement that focused on identity politics (Nolde, 1991). The women's movement focussed more on grassroots issues within African communities most affected by the exclusionary apartheid regime and mobilised the masses in order to build a strong support base for the resistance movement in support against the apartheid government.

Women's agency in South Africa unlike that of men was articulated in the 1950s when women retaliated against the pass laws and planned a mass demonstration against the apartheid government in defiance (Kemp et al., 2018). This one event will forever highlight the strength that women have within the state and the power and authority that resides in women's organising and mobilising (Badri & Tripp, 2017). During the pass law campaign period, gauging by the number of women that marched to the Union Building in 1956, women became more active in politics. Many women joined the armed struggle while some served long-term imprisonment and others went into exile alongside their male counterparts (Lyons & Israel, 2017). It was during this time that women's status in the politics of South Africa became more prominent.

In South Africa, the idea of womanhood and citizenship can be connected to motherhood and somewhat understood on very different notions to that of Western feminist thought (Walker, 1995; Healy-Clancy, 2017). In understanding the idea of motherhood values such as ubuntu come into play, for the women in the women's movement motherhood or motherism was closely connected to womanhood and good citizenship. Hence to be a woman in a community for many women entailed caring for the needs of communities at large and formed part of citizenship ideals that remains important for women in women's clubs, organisation and also the women's movement. The ideals connected to mothering a community can be seen to be connected to one of the reasons why women were the ones who organised the mass protest to the South African Union Building in solidarity against the pass laws which impacted on their ability to cater for the needs of the community. The pass laws were a document similar to a passport that people had to walk around with and could be stopped by South African police, and was used as a means to control the freedom of movement of people of colour (Wells, 1982). It was women who resisted the pass law because it restricted their movement and would ultimately impact on their family lives and access to move around freely in South Africa, hence impacting on their freedom of movement, which affected the way that they served their community (Britton, 2005, 66). A typical example can be connected to how women supported each other in moving groceries for families from African women working in the then suburbs. Prior to the pass laws women could easily collect groceries from other women working in the suburbs and take this to the townships. However when the pass laws became a law, women in the townships could not freely move around hence their access to and freedom of movement made it difficult for them to provide groceries to families feely. This suggests womanhood and good citizenship can be seen to be connected to the agency and form part of the agenda of women in South Africa (Hassim, 1999)

The women's organisations also became active in the Defiance Campaign of 1952 where they played a leading role. In the Eastern Cape 1067 of the 2 529 defiers were women, with Florence Matomela at the forefront (Vahed, 2015). The Women's League was then asked by the Congress Alliance to assist in organising the 1955 Congress of the People, where the Freedom Charter was to be adopted (Carter, 1972). This gave the women an opportunity to lobby for the incorporation of their demands into the charter. In 1955, the issue of passes came forth again as the government announced that it would start issuing reference books from January 1956. A demonstration was held on the 27th of October 1955 and was attended by 2 000 women. On the 9th of August 1956, the women of the league confronted Prime Minister J.G. Strydom, under the auspices of the Federation of South African Women with a petition against pass laws (Walker, 1991).

Hassim (2006, 81) suggests that it was also during this tenure that women's organisations in South Africa gained insights on how to organise effectively and mobilise the mass population taking to the streets. In the view of this article, this is what made the women's movements relevant and allowed their efforts to gain momentum. As a result, they became a powerful force for organising the mass population contributing to the eradication of the apartheid regime (Kemp et al., 2018; Hassim, 1991). Further, women made many

advances in their efforts due to engagement and dialogue with their constituencies that focused on equality and overcoming women's discrimination. This period therefore set the foundation for what was to come as much was happening in the move towards greater liberation, women also felt included and active in this process of creating change (Kadalie, 1995).

The 1960s became a period marked as forcing the liberation movements into exile and operating underground due to the banning of political parties (Ottaway, 1991). Women's activism was also affected as this was a mass movement limiting women's efforts; however, at the time the radical Black Consciousness (BC) movement propelled women's involvement again in the 1970s (Hadfield, 2017) and focused on race and class issues while omitting gender. The Black Women's Federation (BWF) that existed within the BC focused on race and class issues, motherhood remained the focal point for black women within the movement and was linked to their mandate for changing society. Women often shied away from bringing up issues to the decision-making table with men, as men still largely dominated the direction of political parties and women's issues were not the focus at the time (McClintock, 1991; Bonnin, 1996).

Even though women had the ability to effectively and efficiently mobilise the mass population, their interests were not at the forefront, thus making them subordinate, under exposed and demobilised in driving their agenda. During this time, women had not as yet made their mark in politics, eradicating the struggles they were confronted with most (Hassim, 2002). Undoubtedly, women's issues are aligned to many other challenges, making their agenda with the liberation movements a collective agenda, as community struggles did impact on women as they had to be the backbone of society when the men in the community had to fight war, or their children took to the streets against the indoctrinations of apartheid. Therefore, women understood community struggles and challenges, as they were closest to the people at the grassroots (Meer, 1985; McEwan, 2003; Healy-Clancy, 2017). This is one theme that is explored and validated through the study, highlighting the under exposed significant ways in which women contributed to the politics of the state.

Women's organisations required a degree of autonomy in order for them to drive their own agenda, build their own structures and drive their own agency and interests. Women also required organic leadership to emerge in mobilising and building capacity. Given that multitudes of women marched to the Union Building without men, this shows women consciously decided they wanted to play an organising and mass mobilisation role and they supported building liberation movements to thrive. This was a mere extension of how many of the women wanted to participate and contribute, even though there were many challenges in the move towards the need for an evolved women's movement that so many women aspired towards and did eventually materialise.

One of the weaknesses of the women's movement was the need for the greater allocation of resources for these women; this would have accelerated their drive towards their own agenda. Even though leadership was not built up in their women's movement branches, feminist attitudes were evident in the women's organisations, through the articulation of links between gender oppression in the private sector, race, and class and gender discrimination (Nolde 1991; Poinsette, 1985; Beall, 1982). Further, women's organisations led to small spaces that were not occupied by men and where women could articulate themselves and their agenda, thus creating influence to a certain extent (Hassim & Walker, 1993).

Hence the women's organisations focus on the apartheid regime (Hassim, 2002), which impacted on how women were included, affecting how they negotiate and compromising their autonomy. Furthermore, many global factors impacted on women's organisations, causing them to craft and drive their own agendas. This highlights that women's liberation features vaguely in this Utopian society faced with struggles in the political, economic and social, when in actual fact there was the need for undertones of cultural and social needs to be included in the liberation struggle too (Hassim, 2006).

Consequently, there were high levels of women's participation that existed during the exile period within parties such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the ANC. Furthermore, it was the grassroots organisation that actively participated in organising and mobilising against the repressive apartheid regime. At the time, the ANC demonstrated a rather rigid top-down leadership model, resulting in many women's organisations opting to participate in the UDF during this tenure (Britton, 2005).

Hassim (2006) highlights that the 1980s were considered radical years for resistant movements within apartheid South Africa, but even more so for the ANC. It was during this tenure that women actively participated in the politics of South Africa. This highlights their equal contribution to the armed struggle and gave precedence to how women were able to be involved in military warfare, a sort of involvement which directly challenges gendered stereotypes (Ngculu, 2009). This was one of the steps taken by women's organisations within South Africa to contribute to flagging the connection between national liberation and women's issues.

It was during the 1980s that feminism really became a contested topic within South Africa, even though at this time women's organisations within South Africa also discussed feminism within the state. Many women within the Federation of South African Women (FESAW) were affiliated with eh UDF which was formed in 1983, this constituted close to 400 anti-apartheid institutions and operated as the internal wing of the ANC. One of the prominent leaders in the UDF was Albertina Sisulu, one of the few women in the executive committee (Britton, 2005). The women's movement gained momentum during the inception of the pass legislation.

This set the precedence for a new political interest group within the highly gender oppressive apartheid state. It was during the 1980s that internal resistance grew alongside the ANC in exile. This was due to the spread of women's groups in townships and the numbers of women that participated in politics grew. This led to the establishment of key women's organisations such as the United Women's Organisation in the Western Cape, The Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW) and the National Organisation of Women (NOW). They played a key role in shaping organisations during the 1980s and 1990s (Hassim, 2006).

In expounding on this during the ANC tenure in exile, women had to fight to be included as agents of the armed struggle and even their own women's issues and struggles, which often remained neglected, as it was suggested that gaining liberation was the key focus at the time. Hassim (2007) argues that nationalism as an ideology has been resistant to gender equality. Even though nationalist discourses provided for the politicisation of women, it did not provide for these women to have autonomy, drive their own interests of agenda. In further exploring this matter, the military culture that was instituted when the ANC took to arms made it rather difficult for women to articulate their own voices, as the levels of hierarchy and exile culture led to a degree of exclusion for women's agenda (Magadla, 2015).

The women's rights movement was primarily connected to South African women's active participation in ensuring that the national liberation struggle ends, and the apartheid regime dissipates (Hassim & Walker, 1992). However, these women who formed part of the movement remained subject to oppression under colonialism and were gravely unfairly treated under patriarchy. Under apartheid, the Marxist movement acknowledged women's need to enjoy their civil liberties in all aspects of their lives, both the public and private (Bizzoli, 1983). Even though this ideology acknowledged that women were oppressed and marginalised, the challenge with feminism as a thought system housed within Marxism was its short-lived acknowledgement under the oppressive apartheid regime.

The ideology Marxism within the ANC acknowledged women's oppression within national liberation, and not necessarily in the post-liberation period, as patriarchy parasitically reinforced itself in the system. This was also true for the ANC where in 1990 women's issues came to the fore, and it was acknowledged as an independent factor within national liberation struggle, by the ANC (Jara, 2013).

In understanding the modus operandi of the women's movement, history and context becomes rather important, Geisler (2004) suggests that in Africa, women's actions were limited as the result of norms and traditions, political parties and the state. Notably, the state caused women to detach themselves, driving their explicit objectives separate to that of the state. Women undertook this form of engagement for approximately 40 years, creating a disconnect between men and women in engaging on women's issues, in order for them to drive their own interests and have autonomy and equal integration with men.

Notably, under the apartheid regime South African women's changes emanated as a result of their militancy in defiance to imperialist control. The women who joined the militant wing of the ANC, Mkhonto We Sizwe, were perceived as powerful military cadres. This perception was not challenged from a cultural

and socially acceptable perspective, in South Africa as women participated as equals to men, under this political trajectory. Their inclusion aimed to defend their roles as mothers, a different notion to that of in Western feminist thought (Geisler, 2004). Motherism is a rich concept in feminist thought, the ideals connected to motherism in South Africa encompass being a mother of the nation, caring for ones community and being a matriarch in society supporting progress and advancement at large. This was widely accepted by women in South Africa, and was even used in the postliberation trajectory as struggle heroines such as Albertina Sisulu and Winnie Mandela were termed "mother of the nation" in many instances.

It is for this reason that motherist ideals led the women's participation in the defiance campaign, such as the pass law protests. These women in 1950 demonstrated to their husbands the power women possessed in ensuring their efforts to gain recognition, as women from different races, classes, and ethnic groups mobilised in unity and solidarity. This ultimately led to the creation of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) in 1954.The FSAW often recruited women highlighting their domestic role and "motherhood" Hence women in this trajectory embraced norms and imagery of women as mother of the nation (Walker, 1995). This is ultimately was propelled their involvement within politics and is another aspect that highlights the South African women's movement uniqueness. These women acknowledged the importance of caring for their family demonstrating that their mode of organising was not connected to "separationist feminist liberation (Britton, 2005)."

However, it is worth noting that the prominent activist Gertrude Fester (Britton, 2005) argued that women needed to tone down on the motherism aspects because older women in the movement at the time promoted this but young women that were entering in the women's movement might not have considered motherism as their only or key focus, as not all women wanted to focus on that alone. Some women wanted to focus on feminist matters such as policy development on women issues or important issues. This suggests that diverse feminist ideals prevailed within this movement.

The Women's Charter (WC) affirmed the women's agenda and interests in the region and was acknowledged by 146 members who formed part of a constituency of 230 000. Walker (1982) suggests that the WC was a noteworthy document which envisioned the transcendence of women beyond its current historical context. The WC clearly highlighted the challenges of patriarchy and male dominance, and the need for men to work with women for greater equity and gender fairness, free from oppressing women. It was through such women's mass-based groups such as FEDSAW that women rallied unified for a common aim.

It was during the transition period in 1990, there was a re-imagination of women's interests, purely because the goal posts had shifted and women's civil liberties and freedoms depended largely on gaining greater institutional power and authority (Molyneux, 1998). One must be conscious that the women's rights struggle in South Africa during the democratic negotiations and transition process occurred at the time when the global women's movement had gained momentum. So, after the conflict resolution process had settled in 1995, feminists organised and mobilised much more at the global level with the execution of the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women that impacted positively on women's groups and their efforts at the national and local level paving the way for a global gender trajectory (Molyneux et al., 2020; Obiora, 1997; Sewpaul, 2005; Sen, 2015).

***After the 1994 period***

After the 1994 elections in South Africa, there was scepticism and lack of belief that the transition provided sufficient political rationale for a women's alliance, which would include women from all political backgrounds. The Women's National Coalition formation was an important step towards forming a political movement driven by women as opposed to their male counterparts. This identified women as a political force with an agency and agency in their own right (Hassim, 2006). As was the case in many postliberation trajectories, women's organisations constituted of huge numbers, often posing a challenge as a possible competitor to the government. This led to states guarding against an independent women's organisations and as was the case in South Africa the women's movement was attempted and co-opted in order to prevent this mass women's movements to become too powerful in authority and strength (Geisler, 2004).

In an effort to be included the WNC, women used the Bill of Right negotiation process, thus setting the platform for the greater exchange of ideas in the political space. An inclusionary strategy was part of this, as in the case of most states undergoing transition. The plan was for the greater inclusion of diverse women and stakeholders in order to impact on the type of negotiations and how this affects women's short-term constituency and also their legitimacy in the long run (Hassim, 2006). This aim of the ANC was to ensure that the transition process impacted on groups such as women and the rural communities as they often tend to be absent from the institutional decision-making processes.

Women in South Africa contributed to the negotiation process through different ideas and notion of democracy and equality and their meanings within the SA context. Women's inclusion did not focus solely on women but on diverse stakeholders (Seidman, 1999). Hassim, (2006) suggests the process would be closely aligned to the steps taken by the elite to secure their political base. Clearly, greater inclusion remains an agenda for the marginalised and downtrodden seeking equal rights and equal citizenship in the politics of the state. This statement holds significance for the SA women's organisations seeking greater inclusion and participation as a means to equal representation and eradicating inequality, as a means for women to gain full citizenship that would lead to more concrete inclusion within a democratic dispensation. This also highlights that woman did not see themselves as equal to men but rather this was an opportune time for them to create a political space where they could articulate their diverse agendas and citizenship. Despite this, the coalitions focus remained very narrow (Hassim, 2006; Kadalie, 1995), hence this important transition period was an opportune time for the women's movement to evolve and perhaps also a missed opportunity for these groups. As the women's movement could have transpired into a movement that included diverse women's interests such as a combination of both feminists and mothersist ideals with greater activism and diverse constituencies are represented and policy change or formation also play key roles in their agenda setting on women's issues.

It is true, that relative independence advances wider and thorough agendas, independent of governments and political parties (Geisler, 2004). As such, it is worth examining whether the women's presence has been felt in strengthening the gender parity trajectory and discourses and in securing a more equitable society in the aftermath of conflict and war. Given that women in South Africa have made their voice heard, what remains is whether they can maintain and promote this in South Africa where the termination of class and racial divides remained at the forefront of the ANCs agenda, due to the parties close ties with the Communist Party (CP).

In the immediate post-colonial context, women did not feature as prominently and remained uncertain, due to the ANCs alliances with powerful; forces that shared hostility to gender equality (McClintock, 1991; Hassim, 2002). This included, although not only limited to, rural chiefs who protected their traditional power focusing on safeguarding their ownership of land and resources under their own laws linked to custodianship. The Rural Women's Movement aspired to promote the ownership of land by women who worked on the land; and this was hampered by the ANC alliances such as the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Hassim, 2006).

The manner in which democratic institutions steered gender in the aftermath of apartheid South Africa impacted on the equal and inclusive transformation of society. Additionally, the manner in which the Constitution and women's movement downplayed non-sexism is what altered the current gender trajectory in South Africa. As was depicted in the Jacob Zuma and Kwezi rape trial (Frenkel, 2008; Hassim, 2009), which highlighted how cultural norms and the subordination of women and other genders were silenced, even in instances that caught the attention of the public (Meintjes, 2008).

Hassim (2005) suggests that with increased change linked to laws and policy promoting gender fairness, the state became more answerable to civil society. In retrospect, women's representation and participation resides with women's organisations that survived all South Africa's democratic elections and that are active in the political system and through which women can exercise their political citizenship, crafting political agency and agenda setting on women's challenges more specifically.

In an effort to gain greater insights into political instruments that women use to drive their agenda and women's issues, the analysis of the various political parties will be discussed. This will also provide an

understanding on women's inclusion and active citizenship within these institutions and how women ultimately impact on shaping the politics of modern day neo-liberal South Africa.

The women's rights struggle in South Africa can be characterised as a rather cumbersome process, where at inception of the national liberation movements; women played key roles in organising and mobilising at the grassroots level (Geisler,2004), yet their issues remained neglected and they were not afforded high raking positions in these political parties (StatsSA, 2021). These women compromised their position for that of their families and the nation. These women were confident, that once a free equitable society transpires their voices would be heard and women would become part of the negotiation process driving change and reaping the rewards of this free, fair, equitable and conscious society. However, in the post-apartheid dispensation the women's movement's autonomy was compromised as the result of political party politics. This can be connected to the emphasis on women's representations in mass organising, under the auspices of political parties and not social movements of a social network.

Drawing from the rich evidence on women's active agency, this study agrees with Hassim (2006) that women's organisations are inherently intricate and multifaceted, multi-layered undertakings, at various times working side by side with the state and sometimes contrasting the state. Furthermore, South Africa represents the dynamic interplay between collaborative accomplishment and the unstable landscape of social constructions. As seen in the changing landscape of activism throughout apartheid, the negotiated transition and the post-1994 democratisation processes, chronological periods and context are central to analysing engagement and civil society organisations.

In South Africa, the majority of women MPs in South Africa's 1994 parliament were not feminists, and notably many of these were a proportional representation of those women who participated in the liberation struggle (Bauer, 2008). Whether women who formed part of the women's movement were feminists or activists is not an easy question to gauge as the women's struggle in South Africa has not been given the full attention for its contributions to ensuring the termination of the apartheid regime and smooth democratic transition (Britton & Fish, 2009). Henceforth, women's stance on policy did not always come to decision making processes, instead their activism through organising always took precedence due to historic reasons.

Walsh (2008, 4) suggests that if the focus of the state in relation to the role of feminists plays in the politics of the state, it is purely focused on the women's movement and policy advocacy. Often abandoning other instruments that women should use to drive their agenda and represent their electorates such as public dialogue that transpires from women groups of other organisations. Thus, the differences between the women's movement and feminisms within South Africa in a post-colonial trajectory must be explored. One must be cognisant that there are very few feminists who acknowledge society at large as a meaningful 'organising category', and the importance that they create for citizenship (Howell & Mulligan, 2004; Jaggar, 2005; Eto, 2012). Hence, women's groups and a feminist agenda is often not in alignment, as feminists are more policy focused and as in the case of South Africa, women's organisations at large have remain focussed on the grassroots developmental issues. In the view of this study, aspects pertaining to the diversity of women's participation and constituency, has been represented by to these two ideological groupings, in the post apartheid political dispensation of South Africa (Hassim, 1991; Frenkel, 2008; Kemp et al., 2018).

Coincidentally, not all women shared equal rights both under apartheid an in the new democratic dispensation due to different intersections of oppression that prevail for women along the lines of race and class. This does not ultimately determine whose agenda is always driven, by whom and why and can be seen to be connected to the idea that under the apartheid regime, white women enjoyed certain privileges such as the right to vote in the 1930s and own property in certain instances (Healy-Clacy, 2017). On the other hand, black women were not afforded these privileges, and had to wait approximately 60 years, after white women were afforded the right to vote in South Africa, these same black African women still remain highly marginalised (Poinsette, 1985). These examples cited clearly demonstrate that the women's movement or rather women's organisations at present must consider this.

The ever changing South African environment places new stresses on women's groups. Women's mobilisation in the early 1990s no longer holds relevance to South Africa's changing political terrain, as

gender organisations now face a completely different state structure and emerging human security challenges, alongside intersecting oppressions that women face.

**Intersectional challenges, political parties and the politics of women's interests in South Africa**

Scholars suggest that political party association is more important in impacting on political behaviour in the legislative process, as opposed to women driving women's issues (Osborn, 2014; Hoskyns, 1996). There is also not enough literature on post-liberation, and democratic transition periods and the relationships between women and political parties, as this has been studied in more industrialised developed states (Dittmar, 2015). Hence, this section, examines this trajectory in order to infer outcomes.

If one explores the challenges that women faced throughout this last century, they remain diverse in their nature. Women in South Africa have in the past contributed significantly to the ascension of political parties through their existence, shaping ideological advances, and also advancing organisations and their development, through the organising and mobilisation work that women do.

Women's political mobilisation in political parties continues to limit women's agenda even in relation to driving societal issues. Even when women run with an approved gender equality endeavour, they still need the approval from the political party. Considering that in most political parties, male representation as decision takers outweighs that of women (Maziwisa, 2020; Wright, 2020). Thus, party politics play an important role in ensuring positive narratives linked to gender ideology and the equal representation of women. The South African political party gendered project cannot be examined without analysing the political party representation of women, impacts on driving women's issues through laws that directly impact on the constituencies represented.

Elite women within the South African political dispensation play a central role in shaping politics through their decision-making role and power base (Hassim, 2006). Often enough opulent women who are educated, form part of the higher Living Standards Measures (LSMs), come from fortunate backgrounds, having had access to education and economic status forming part of the higher-class system in society. This is the group of women who participate in the high-level political decision-making processes alongside men in high-ranking positions of power.

Political parties have attempted to create a conducive environment that fosters the inclusion of women's leadership in their structures. This can be connected to the ANC party manifestos and strategies that hold them accountable. However, there have been a number of women who have criticised and continue to highlight the limitations placed on women in political parties (Walsh, 2010).

The results of the ANC National Executive Group (NEC) Elections that resided in 2018 is an attestation of the status of women in the politics of South Africa. The Ramaphosa Top 6 National Executive Group of the ANC, depicts a male network with fiive males elected and one woman who was re-elected. Hence, male-dominated party leadership is still dominant in South Africa. The images of the ANCWL also demonstrated a stagnant symbolism of a women group that drives memberships and lacks a full-bodied voice. Under the liberation struggle, women such as Mahau Pheko reiterated the privileged party members clearly requested for women to be dependent on the decisions taken by top leadership, in many cases this was men and that they must not be undisciplined vocal members. In the postliberation period, this too holds relevance, as party members like Makhozi Khoza communicated her disgruntlement against a once loved party that in her view showed clear cracks of male shamanism.

However, historically and more particularly under the Mbeki Administration in 1999 and also under the Zuma Administration between 2009-2018, many women were silenced within political party systems as was the case with Makhozi Khozi a member of the ANC who worked in local government and suggested she was labelled undisciplined due to her outspokenness (Mbatha, 2005). Coincidentally, there was a space for women's agency, in voter registration opinion polls, as women excelled in their voter registration levels and support for women gained momentum. Furthermore, it was in 1999 that more women approved gender quotas in political parties and their participation in steering decisions.

Moreover, a study by the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) in 1999 found that women were not targeted as interest groups, and the campaigns at the time were male focused and women running the party

lines were not elevated by their parties (CGE, 1999). This demonstrated that women were really never considered to be in the frontline, and the stark outcomes have revealed themselves in party politics, particularly for the ANC where female representation seems to have regressed, where women are still underrepresented in decision-making bodies(Musetsho et al, 2021), and women of colour have been the ones most affected by this (Thobejane, 2013).

In the ANC , women has also infrequently acted as party spokespersons and women have not gained momentum in becoming political party leaders nor have, they been given the platform by parties. This suggests that women's issues do not remain a priority for these parties who seem to only pay real attention to the quotas, perhaps only as a means of ticking the box for global rankings.

Women are not to be blamed altogether as there have been many instances where women retaliated against men and this often led to them being disciplined within the party rankings. A typical example if cited in the disapproval of direct confrontation regarding women struggle for leadership with COSATU. In 1997, the organisation's only female national officer, Connie September, suggested an 18-month enquiry endorsing a gender quota of 50 per cent by the year 2000 to increase women's presence in union leadership positions. Support for a quota was supported by the ANCWL. It was the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the COSATU general secretary, the COSATU unions that blatantly rejected the quota (Walsh, 2008). These instances demonstrate that there are great plans in place for women's advancement; however, challenges linked to implementation in institutionalising gender mainstreaming remain grave and souring.

Political party's gendered political stories are a key focus area when answering the key research question of this study on the politics of women in pluralist South Africa, Political parties in the region contribute to shaping the legislative process's power and influence which impacts on gender equity. This is primarily as the result of increased number of women in parliament, drive new ideas into the legislative system so as to impact positively on the parliamentary system taking women's issues in cognisance at high levels of state power (Phillips, 1995). This means that women need to be present in parliament both physically and intellectually, in order for them to have greater legitimacy and representation within South African democratic system.

This is linked to the institutionalising of democracy in 1994, and set the platform for women's engagement in the politics of South Africa. This meant that under democratic rule, the women's organisation focussed on electoral campaigning as one of the goals of the body. Hassim (2005, 208) argues that the interconnection between women and political parties impacted on women's activism in South Africa in a number of ways. The region has played a role in influencing gender equity and this remains on the political radar in the postcolonial trajectory. Hence, it was not only about feminists making it to Parliament but rather what changes they would articulate and bring to the South African terrain. Importantly, it is also the hindrances that remains and these women's organisation and women themselves balanced party aims and feminist aims, which can often contradict each other within nationalistic discourses. What remains at the heart of the advancement of gender matters is how women's movement can practically ensure that elite women leaders carry the beacon of trust ensuring that the true challenges faced by ordinary women on the ground is brought forward at high levels and remains at the heart of this article.

In understanding women's current positions and contribution to the politics of South Africa, it is important to remember that it was ideology that guided women's activism in the labour union and national liberation struggle (Britton & Fish, 2008). Being cognisant of the fact that women's interests represent the interests of those marginalised due to sex and gender and encapsulate their acknowledgement regarding redistribution and their representation of women's issues and feminist challenges (Bentley, 2004; Ballard, 2005; Hassim, 2005).

In the ANC, the women's quota on the party lists was not something that was accepted warmly. Women's issues in society within this context have not been open to being dominated by men, in both the public and private. Further to this, the labour market, private life, family and state are the sphere of people's lives that do impact on civil society at larger. In political party's as is the case in all institutions, patriarchal

sexual attitudes and the sexual division of the workforce is what has played a major role for women in the South African trajectory (Walsh, 2008).

In parliament political parties influence the political systems through engagement and remaining connected to the functioning of the legislature through allowing different political organisations representation of their party constituencies through this process of engagement (Goetz et al., 2003). Essentially, this can be said to makes political parties, important actors that are meant to ensure that parliament functions optimally adhering to policy and processes. In essence this should be the platform where women drive their agenda aggressively.

Further, the reason why women's positioning and participation in political parties is so crucial is because women institutionalise their worldviews within the legislature through the structures, processes and laws that shape the political system (Caul, 1999). It is through the process of political parties allowing women formal representation into parliament that women have greater authority in representing women's issues through politics in order to contribute to the advancement gender-equality within state organisations (Lovenduski & Norris, 1993).

The work of Hassim (2005) hold relevance, parties must support solidarity with women leaders, for them to maintain strong relations with their constituency, remaining accountable to them. This is a two-fold process that unconsciously sets the precedence for men in these political parties to be the ones to initiate support for these women leaders. Both these two assertions discussed, highlight that states must not run the risk of driving numbers as opposed to maintaining quality process. Additionally, women need representation in Parliament in line with the quota system, and what remains of even paramount importance is their participation in overcoming gender discrimination. Political quotas which are also referred to as legal candidate quotas require that political parties nominate a certain proportion of women on their candidates lists. However, this does not guarantee that a certain amount of women will be elected into parliament or government.

For both the state and political parties to live up to their mandate, there must be focus on changing patriarchal settings and the acknowledgement of women as equals to their male counterparts, this will set the platform for a more transformed society. What remains at the heart of this is the idea of an organized constituency (Hassim, 1999). In the view of this study, this type of constituency allows for any political party to remain relevant to the needs of women who often drive the agenda and overcoming challenges for their constituency. In South Africa this is also rather relevant, as is the case in the case of South Africa remains social organisations and the mass population's challenges.

Based on current political party selection processes and candidate lists, within the South African trajectory, intra-party candidate selection can either propel women's participation and representation within formal or informal political life. This is because candidate selection rules do impact on women's influence within elected office (Caul, 1999). Therefore, the mechanisms employed in the candidate selection process remain key, as this is what determines the gender story of the various political parties within the stipulated trajectory.

This means that in order for women to shape formal politics and legalities around women's progress candidate selection can act as a propeller. The instruments employed determine the number of women from the political party can be put forth for consideration for the political list, in an effort to gain entry into the parliamentary system, where women's centralisation and decentralisation position can be identified (Ballington, 1999; Gouws, 1999; Coetzee, 1999). Due to ideological reasons and in the case of South African dominant political party the ANC, it can become rather easy to refer to how their political worldview impacts on women's representation (Caul, 1999).

Furthermore, there are many political actors relevant to steering women's representation within the political system. The existence of autonomous actors that propel gender-consciousness is something that is necessary so as to ensure that women's representation does not become consumed by the state. This leaves room for segregated women's representation where the elite can drive their own agenda overlooking the diverse needs of women across the spectrum. It is in promoting a diverse range of actors that women's organisations both within the public and private arena effectively communicate women's issues across the

spectrum (Paxton et al., 2007). The aim is to create a strong political women's constituency and interest group that hold elite decision-makers accountable to them.

In understanding women's status in political systems, in connection to political parties, aspects such as interests and agenda is often a determining factor. The politics of women is often aligned to who gets what when and for what reason. Molyneux (1985) suggests that women's interests can be understood at two levels namely: women's concrete gender interests and their strategic gender focussed interests often aligned to either feminist or non-feminist notions of women's challenges confronted with. Concrete gender interests do not focus on women's socially engineered gender roles and are rather focused on matters pertaining to women's physical and basic needs required for them to live more fulfilled lives. Women's strategic gender interests directly challenge socially constructed gender roles and encompass eradicating patriarchy and male dominance a typical example can be alluded to marriage legislation. Inevitably both types of women's groups whether feminist or not aim to transform the current political system in a manner that is more tolerant and aware of women and their subordination (Hassim, 2005).

In further understanding women's interests with regards to both feminist and non-feminist perspectives, equality-based claims and difference-based claims must be explored. Equality based claims highlight that woman should have the same access to politics as men in numbers and along all lines. Whereas difference-based claims concur that women's different characteristic should allow them to have representation in politic (Lovenduski, 2005). Women in Africa live very different lives to women in Europe or the USA due to differing cultural and societal norms to mention a few. This suggests that women's interests as a collective group based on homogeneity of interests represents false perception.

The Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) Investigative Report (2016) suggests Article 9 promotes for the Right to Participation in the Political and Decision-Making Process. Furthermore, State Parties must ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making. Despite these well-crafted policies and advances in legislation, there is the continued trend of gender unfairness in the many spheres of society (Enaifoghe & Maramura, 2019). This can be seen to be connected to the gender unfairness challenges, where women are more likely to be underemployed in comparison to men in the formal economy (Francis, 2020) (Niyimbanira, 2016), being able to secure work within the economy (Beukes et al, 2017) (Escalante et al, 2021), secondly receiving the same and/or fair remuneration in comparison to their male counterpart (Bosch & Barit, 2020; Musethsi et al, 2021; Francis, 2020; Bussin & Christos, 2016) and lastly being able to progress in their careers once in local government structures into leadership role that should (Chitiga, et al., 2021; Eagly & Carli, 2018; Ibarra et al, 2010) grant women equal access to become decision makers alike their male counterpart. This explains the low proportion of women to men in leadership (Ndinda et al, 2012; Mathur-Helm, B., 2006).

In contemporary South Africa, there are mixed perceptions about women's status in political parties. In some instances, and as highlighted by Geisler (2004) women have encountered resistance and been demeaned for raising matters pertaining to gender challenges. Furthermore, there have also been a number of examples cited, where MPs suggest that when they raise women issues in parliament, they are seen to be making irrelevant claims and this can impact negatively on their survival as MPs in parliament (Geisler, 2000; Britton 2005; Walsh, 2012). This suggests that women's issues are still gravely downplayed and underscored in one the highest institutions of power and authority.

## Conclusion

This article has focused on the politics of women in South Africa. This has been through a conceptualisation of the South African women's movement and political system. Women remain underrepresented in political institutions primarily due to political party plans. This suggests that women do not autonomously drive their own agenda and set their own issues at the decision taking discussion, this is limited to political parties and top leadership that is steered by male patriarchy and dominance. Women in South African have however pushed through the boundaries of exclusion and continue to do so through civil society. This is, even though civil society's voice has become limited, as opposed to the pre-1994 period.

It was during the negotiation period the women's movements participated in crafting legislation and laws focussing on addressing women's issues in order to represent their constituency and advance women's challenges in the country (Hassim, 2005; Levy, 2013). The Women's Movement in South Africa in an exceptional way steered the mass-based anti-apartheid struggle, after the banning of political parties, the ANC and PAC, clearly creating a revival of mass based representation, through their grass-roots networks which included various actors of the state such as the United Women's Organisation (UWO) in the Western Cape, the Federation for Transvaal Women (Fedtraw) and the Natal Women's Organisation (NOW), alliance of the UDF, in ensuring a diversified composite that represented various constituencies (Hassim, 2003).

The South African women's movement was a diverse network that comprised of women at all levels through political parties such as the ANCWL, the Womens National Coalition which encompassed women's groups and ordinary women at large played an active and key role in securing change for the vast mass population and in eradicating the apartheid regime. The role of the women's movement in the peace talks process was clearly articulated in the Constitution, new laws targeted at women and frameworks that highlighted the greater inclusion and representation of women. Even though during these times women might not have occupied key positions in the top six of organisations, and required political party invitations to the peace talks or not having met with the NP government at inception in alignment with their top male leaders-their presence, their efforts have been ultimately articulated through concrete outcomes.

Given that, women's movements in Africa often share a rich history with political parties and their agenda is connected to social transformation and civil rights (Geisler, 2004). This had led to relationship and alliance formation as independent women's groups have regularly betrothed with non-feminist actors in order to collaborate on a common cause(s). Thus, Molyneux (1998) suggests that women's movements are categorised by a variety of agendas, including state-linked mass institutions for women and other organisations that don't primarily need to focus on women's challenges or even gender. This is closely aligned to Geisler (2004) who concurs with Tripp (2010) that African women make use of "associational autonomy" as a means of testing the state as a strategy to drive their agenda.

Furthermore, women endured the everyday struggles for their families, communities and society at large. The South African women who participated in the liberation struggle and their resilience towards their cause encompassed attending to grassroots issues that affected communities most such as access to basic services and education factors affecting their children such as the 1976 riots, when their men were imprisoned as in the case of the Rivonia Trial and when men were detained for weeks, they had to carry the family and nations during their dark periods, a typical example can be cited in the life of Albertina Sisulu, Charlotte Maxeke and Winnie Mandela.

In addition, the study has highlighted that women's issues are driven by activism and feminists. There is the need for greater coordination for women's issues to go forward and unity among women from different political parties and civil society representing different constituencies, as depicted by the Women's National Coalition (WNC). This is in essence where women's power in organising a political force and for the advocacy that allows them to drive their issues remains.

One of the most important contributions of the South African women's movement was its ability to energetically recreate their own agendas through activism and mobilising. The current women's movement close to 30 years into democratic South Africa remains rather feeble in communicating its constituency, women's interests and needs. This is also due to the fragmentation in smaller groups that do not interact much and represent poor mobilisation with other groups lacking an overarching network within the organisation of a women movement. This can be seen to be connected to the mobilising and organising power of the current women's organising as seen as at high profile cases that occurred in the 2000s such as the Zuma rape allegations (6 December 2005) and the Oscar Pistorius (14 February 2013) murder case, where women rights groups have supported and influenced issues related to gender matters.

This article highlights that the women's movement even though weaker than under the apartheid regime, has determined women's agenda in the political space, and at high levels, steered their agency in relation to the different types of women and more to in relation to the politically elite. The study suggests that

women from the politically elite strata are the ones who set women's agenda and predominantly drive women's influence and authority at high levels that is in relation to their political parties-who are dominated by male leadership. Moreover, men are the ones who determine women issues agenda setting in political institutions. Further, partisan politics by nature separates women in parliament alongside women's socio-economic status.

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