

Women empowerment in the South African corporate world

GOONASAGREE NAIDOO

OUR HISTORY spells out clearly that throughout all societies, the patriarchal ideology based on the superior position of men pervades all spheres of life. It is also a common belief that women are generally associated with certain so-called natural abilities and that they perform efficiently in those roles related to domesticity.

Consequently, division of labour in the South African corporate world is often based on these stereotypic gender roles. Tasks that are regarded as challenging, such as management positions, are not easily available to women. Many jobs performed by women, it can be argued, are extensions of work undertaken in the household unit. Much of the employment in the manufacturing sector for example, has been in clothing and textile, and employment in the service sector, dovetails with women's domestic roles.

This is reflected from the available statistics. Women constitute approximately 54% of the population and 2/5 of the paid workforce, that is 39,4% of the workforce. Although they account for 39,4% of the workforce, they account for 68,4% of all service sector employees and more than 1/2 of all clerical and sales positions.

Women also occupy a significant majority of the so-called 'pink-collar' jobs. They comprise of:

- 96% registered nurses
- 90% occupational and radiotherapists
- 86% social workers
- 78.6% hairdressers
- 67% teachers
- 96% domestic workers

On the other end of the spectrum, women are obviously under-represented in the following categories:

- 5.1% artisans and apprentices
- 5.9% communication and related occupations
- 3.1% registered engineers
- 9.6% judges/magistrates
- 0.8% metal and engineering industry

With regard to senior positions in the corporate sector they comprise 1,3% (49) of 3773 directors of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE's) 657 companies:

- 14 women are either:
 - executive directors
 - chairwomen
 - managing directors.

Women represent less than 1% of board members in the corporate world.

The disparities between males and females is also reflected in the results of a survey done in the corporate world, that reveal the following:

In the areas of responsibility and remuneration, even though the average experience, qualifications and hours spent at work were equal, the survey found that:

- male managers had twice as many subordinates as females managers;
- for every male earning less than R60 000 a year, there were eight women; and
- twice as many men than women earned more than R100 000 a year.

It is clear from the available statistics that the South African labour market is very skewed and occupational segregation between men and women clearly exists. Women enter the labour market by virtue of the racial group they belong to and different levels of education and job training.

Status Of Women In The Labour Market

	Black Women	White Women	White Males
not economically active	52%	9%	5%
unemployed	53%	2%	1%
total employees	24%	10%	14%
self-employed	55%	6%	18%

Although women are generally concentrated in service, sales, semi-professional and the professional sectors, not all women are equally represented in the occupational categories. A vast difference exists between black and white

women. Gender inequality in the corporate world takes a specific apartheid-related character. There is inequality within inequality as some are more unequal than others. If we compare the status of white women with black women in the corporate world, the following is evident.

Status Of White Women In The Labour Market

77.6%	managerial, executive and administrative posts,
57.8%	sales and clerical posts;
57.8%	professional, semi-professional and technical; and
5%	service occupations

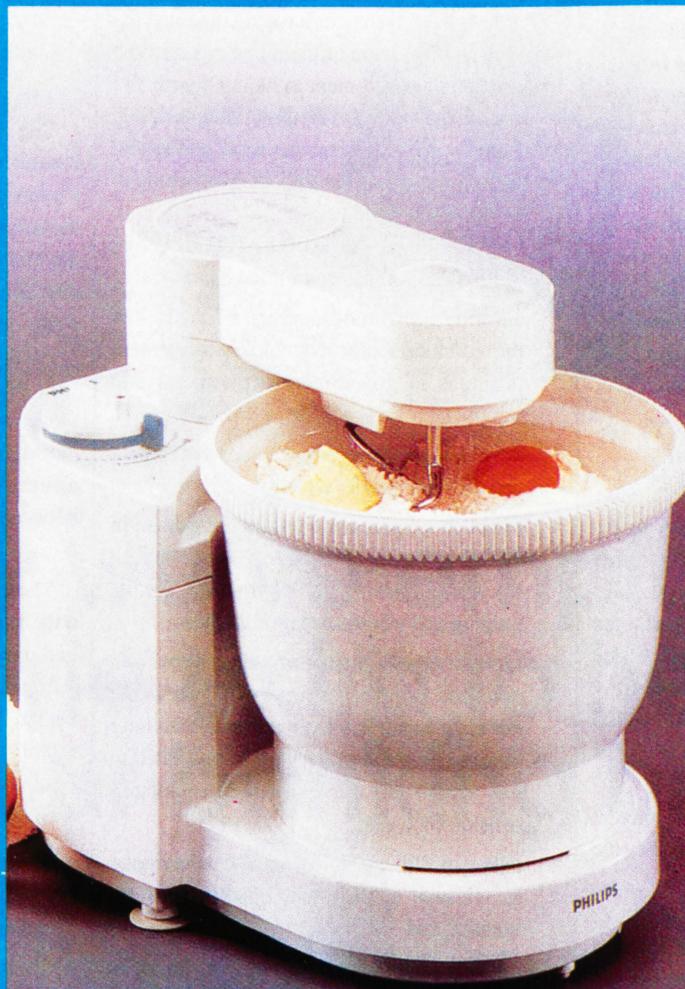
Black women on the other hand are over-represented in low level posts. In this respect they comprise 83.4% in service, production and related occupations and approximately 38% in menial work such as tea-making.

It is thus clear from this that women do not constitute a homogeneous group and their subordination remains interwoven by significant racial and class differences. White women generally have better access to higher status and better jobs, whilst black women are over-represented in lower sector jobs with few or no prospects for growth or upward mobility. It must however be recognised that, even white women who have had more and better opportunities than other women, confront a glass ceiling in occupation with their employment prospects more limited than white males in similar kinds of jobs.

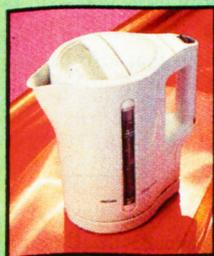
Black women in comparison to white women have thus suffered from many disabilities, some of which are common to white women and others, specific to them. They share national oppression, the burdens of inequality and sexist behaviour, and economic subordination.

It must be acknowledged that the historical social and economic inequalities will mean that women by virtue of their racial groups will stand at different places and require different treatment to attain equality of opportunity and results. Issues on gender in South Africa must thus accordingly take into account the

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GENDER ISSUES

dimensions on the universal issues affecting women and the specific forms that apartheid has given to gender domination in our country.

International experience warns us that the separation of race and gender marginalises black women in favour of black men and white women. Nevertheless, we need specific gender related action to destroy the structures and behaviour patterns created by centuries of discrimination against women. Organisations must be fully committed to harness their human resources as effectively as they can. This does not mean keeping women in pink or blue-collar jobs. Women must be employed in significant decision making position in the corporate world. Our economy depends on the effective utilisation of women.

Government and Women Employment

Many efforts are being undertaken by government to enable women to break through the layers of disabilities identified from the past. At a political level, the government has promoted a greater participation of women. South Africa has 117 women as members of parliament and senators, a speaker of parliament, 101 out of 400 as members of the National Assembly, 3 ministers out of 17 and 3 deputy ministers.

The various women appointed and elected in these visible institutions are likely to advance the cause of gender equality.

The principle of equality on the basis of gender and race is accordingly at the centre of the new constitutional dispensation. The dual recognition of race and gender in the Constitution accepts that inequality and discrimination in South Africa has been based on both race and gender.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) prioritised the plight of women, focusing on addressing their disempowerment in terms of employment. In tandem with the national women's empowerment policy of the RDP, cabinet adopted a resolution on 15 February, 1995 to establish an office in the President's office to improve the status of women. The primary goal is to ensure that gender concerns are mainstreamed in government planning especially through gender units established in each department to formulate policy and legislation.

The government's commitment to women's empowerment is further evident when it signs a number of United Nations conventions on women during conferences. Among these are the:

- convention on political rights for women;
- the convention on the nationality of women;

and

- the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination.

While most conferences have championed the cause of women, none of them has captured the imagination of government as did the fourth UN conference on women in Beijing. Since Beijing, most government departments have committed themselves to support the Beijing programme of action and implement it.

In this regard, the office of the Public Service and Administration has committed itself to:

- ensuring that within four years, at least 30% of the recruits at senior and middle management positions in government departments and provincial offices will be women;
- developing cultural programmes that respect and promote gender equality.
- establish support programmes for women in the public service over the next two years with the aim of opening up opportunities for the training and advancement of women;
- repealing all discriminatory rules and practices. Women can now participate in the home allowance scheme, receive full maternity benefits (in the past, benefits were limited to two births) and access non-discriminatory pension schemes;
- talking positive action over the next ten years to improve employment opportunities for women; and
- creating a central database in 1997 linked to gender disaggregated research in employment practices.

Many government departments have put forward concrete proposals on how they are going to implement their programmes. Some have already established gender forums which monitor women's empowerment. While most departments are striving to increase the number of women in senior positions, the only one that can claim to have reached parity is the Department of Arts, and Culture, Science and Technology in which women hold 33 out of the 66 senior posts.

Government also established a Commission for Gender Equality to:

- give teeth and muscle to combat discrimination and abuse against women;
- ensure that women's issues do not drop off the agenda;
- ensure that rights of women will be respected and implemented in South Africa, monitor and review the policies and practice of state

and statutory bodies at all levels;

- develop educational and information programmes on gender-equality;
- review all laws and recommend legislative amendments to Parliament; and
- investigate all gender related issues.

The Human Rights Commission, Public Protector, and Constitutional Court will assist the Commission for Gender Equality by providing the political, administrative, legislative and judicial environment which will enable women to exercise and defend the economic, social and political rights on an equal basis with men.

At the same time, the establishment of the Commission for Gender Equality will ensure that Government and the private sector transform themselves in order to eradicate discrimination against women and actively promote equality between men and women.

Conclusion

The potential of women in South Africa has only begun to be realised. Although the first step in the direction of empowering women in South Africa has been with the entrenchment of a non-sexist society in the Constitution, and the establishment of the Commission for Gender Equality, it is clear from the discussion above that we have a long way to go to in the corporate world.

It must be recognised that:

- women's oppression as an injustice must be eliminated;
- it is necessary for women to organise to overcome oppression; and
- that the struggle for gender equality is an integral part of, and not a contradiction to the struggle for overall change in South Africa.

We as women, need to take the knife by the sharp edge and face the challenges to struggle against all forms of oppression. We must be active in the formulation of our demands. This is the first step towards women empowerment. Empowerment for us in the final instance should mean having a real choice in what we want to do, whether this is to have children, pursue a career or have a seat in parliament and establishing a society that affirms and values that choice. ■

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African Scholarship in South Africa

Sunset by MIDDAY; Latshon' ilang' emini, by Govan Mbeki Johannesburg, Nolwazi (1996)

REVIEWED BY BURTON JOSEPH*

DECEMBER 1996 marked the 80th anniversary of Fort Hare university in South Africa, once a bastion of African intellectual ferment alongside the likes of Makerere in Uganda and Ibadan in Nigeria. As part of the anniversary celebrations, the book *Sunset by midday: latshon' ilang' emini*, written by eminent politician and scholar Govan Archibald Mvenyelwa Mbeki was launched. *Sunset by midday* is inseparable from the Govan Mbeki Research Fellowship, and the academic revival of Fort Hare as an institution.

The Govan Mbeki fund was established at the University of Amsterdam during 1980. Its objectives were threefold: to provide financial assistance to South African students in exile, stimulate and publish scientific research, and mobilise the university community in these endeavours. Among those who were associated with the Fellowship during its overseas existence were, among others, Pallo Jordan, Essop Pahad, Kader Asmal, Harold Wolpe, Tessa Marcus and Jabulani Kumalo (alias comrade Mzala). Many of these persons have established credible profiles in South African politics and academia.

The progress made towards the democratisation of South Africa during the first half of this decade, necessitated relocation of the project. The palpable need to liquidate the apartheid and bantustan legacy which severely stunted a research culture within historically black universities, favoured Fort Hare as a home for the project. Thus, its relocation in 1993 as the Govan Mbeki Research Fellowship under the directorship of Dr Lindiwe Sisulu. The programme focussed on the reconstruction of political resistance in South Africa during the past fifteen years.

My intention to share knowledge and experience of the Govan Mbeki Fellowship and its drive to resuscitate quality African scholarship with a broader public was rejected by the Southern African Review of Books (SAROB) which is based at the University of Cape Town. Responding on behalf of Ian Phimister, a Ms Robyn Alexander informed me in no uncertain terms that "it is not the policy of SAROB to publish unsolicited material."

While the historically white universities can boast of established academic forums and journals, this has not been a feature of Fort Hare university. The establishment of the Fellowship was a means to generate a research ethos within the institution as part of its transformation process. Regular fellowship seminars were introduced where the research fellows presented papers. No less than ten visiting scholars also presented papers under the auspices of the

Fellowship during the first year of its existence. The debates were of a very good quality and generated an enormous amount of enthusiasm. Most sessions secured capacity audiences.

The majority of the Research fellows travelled extensively, interviewing activists from a variety of organisations. This enabled the Govan Mbeki Fellowship to establish an impressive oral archives focusing on political resistance during the past fifteen years. Together with the six tons of archival material donated by the African National Congress (ANC) to Fort Hare, in 1996, it should become a major stop for researchers specialising on the history and politics of the liberation movements in South Africa.

Under the dynamic directorship of Dr Sisulu, the Fellowship proved to be an empowering instrument which enabled research fellows to be exposed to major facets of project management. Initially, there were no established offices and the Fellowship staff operated from one room. They depended on the university "computer lab" where five computers served more than 5,000 students.

The research fellows were also intimately involved in the arrangement of field trips, seminars and guest lectures, as well as the drafting and presentation of fundraising proposals. An exposure to these finer aspects is not a feature of many research projects I am familiar with within the country.

The research process for the book was not an easy one, given the fact that research interviews were conducted in the heat of an intensive election campaign. Fortunately, the respect commanded by Govan Mbeki among those identified as potential sources made their availability relatively easy despite their massive election workloads. Without their cooperation, the completion of this book would have been delayed quite considerably. Five junior research fellows, Nosipho Mmalebone Masekwameng, Tumi Moleke, Juba Mkani and Burton Joseph rendered their assistance to Govan Mbeki in the production of *Sunset by midday*.

Sunset by midday marks an important scholarly contribution to our understanding of the conflict in South Africa during the past six years. Its overall significance is to be found in its attempt to resuscitate African scholarship in the country as well the academic revival of Fort Hare university in particular, through the Govan Mbeki Research Fellowship.

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Peace in Southern Africa

Peace and Security in Southern Africa, edited by Ibbo Mandaza (Sapes Trust, Harare 1996)

REVIEWED BY THOMAS DEVE

The book *Peace and Security in Southern Africa*, which was published by Sapes Trust late last year is a timely intervention on the current discourse on peace and security, especially for Southern Africa - a region which has experienced various forms of disastrous conflict over the past sixteen years. The collection of essays in this publication reflects a qualitative development of the discourse, from that which conventionally viewed these concepts in the purely militaristic terms, to that which considers them in the context of fundamental social relations, at the global, inter-state and intra-state levels.

This has been made possible by the attendant strengthening of the International Relations Division in the Southern African Regional Institute for Policy Studies (SARIPS) which is reflected/testified in the institution's capacity to mobilise a cross-section of expertise within its network, both within Southern Africa and beyond, namely Thomas Ohlson from the department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University, Tiyanjana Maluwa, Faculty of Law at the University of Cape Town, Winnie Wanzala, Department of Politics and Administration at the University of Namibia, Horace Campbell, African Studies Centre at Syracuse University and Mafa Sejanamane formerly director of the Institute of Southern African Studies in Lesotho.

Key concepts of peace, conflict, conflict resolution and security are analytically covered by Thomas Ohlson who also proceeds to define security in the military, political, economic, social and environmental terms. These are further elaborated on by Winnie Wanzala in her discussion that focuses on emancipating security and development for equity and social justice. Tiyanjana Maluwa highlights the problem of refugees as not only a glaring illustration of the fragility of the intra-state situations of most of our societies in Southern Africa, but also the decline or absence of a Pan-Africanist ethos among many of us.

Mafa Sejanamane's case study of the Lesotho crisis captures crisis of the post-colonial state notably the decay of institutions. The issues raised herein tie in very well with Mandaza's observations that one cannot understand the sub-region "except through an analysis of the various historical, political and socio-economic factors that have over the last three to four centuries combined to define both the continent and the sub-region as we know them today." (pXIII) This seems to suggest that peace and security will remain ephemeral, transient and sometimes even elusive for as long as they are not organically linked to the political and socio-economic process of the societies concerned.

Horace Campbell's contribution puts on the agenda the burning question of regional cooperation and a new concept of peace and security in order to move away from the analysis that often posits peace and conflict resolution from the point of view of governments. He concludes by noting that the experience of war and peace in Southern Africa, opens up new forms of cooperation that could be the basis for new relations between Africa and a reorganised world economy.

The publication appeals to a wide section of society and is compulsory reading for proliferating institutions of peace, students of international relations, most sections of the military, organisations related to the OAU and the UN, and finally, SARIPS' own traditional target audience, those who invest their vision and work in promoting and nurturing social science research debate, teaching and publications in Southern Africa. ■