



WOMEN'S FORUM

A LEGACY TO BE ENRICHED

- GETTY LULAMA

August 9th 1956, stands out not only as a great achievement by women but also as one of the outstanding demonstrations of courage, a relentless struggle for our people's aspirations during the tumultuous decade of the fifties. This day was a resounding victory which echoed the resolute high mood of the Defiance Campaign and the Congress of the People.

The convergence of 20 000 women of different races and organisations reflected unity and a high level of organisation, which is an essential condition for victory. This victory underlined decades of struggle against racist savagery. Many women have always been an integral part of this struggle. Women have broken the shackles that discriminate against them and deny them their rightful service to our people, representing stars of hope for many to follow. On this note we remember and salute our leaders: Lilian Ngoyi, Mary Moodley, Albertina Sisulu and others. We also salute the cadres of our people's army, Umkhonto we Sizwe, like Thandi Modise; many women languishing in jails, Dorothy Nyembe and all other heroic daughters of our beloved country.

THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

Apartheid exposes women to untold racist brutality and exploitation. According to an informal survey of the Domestic Workers and Employers Project (DWEPE) domestics in the Witwatersrand are paid as low as R68 a month while in rural areas it can be as low as R25. These women in many cases are bread-winners in their families.

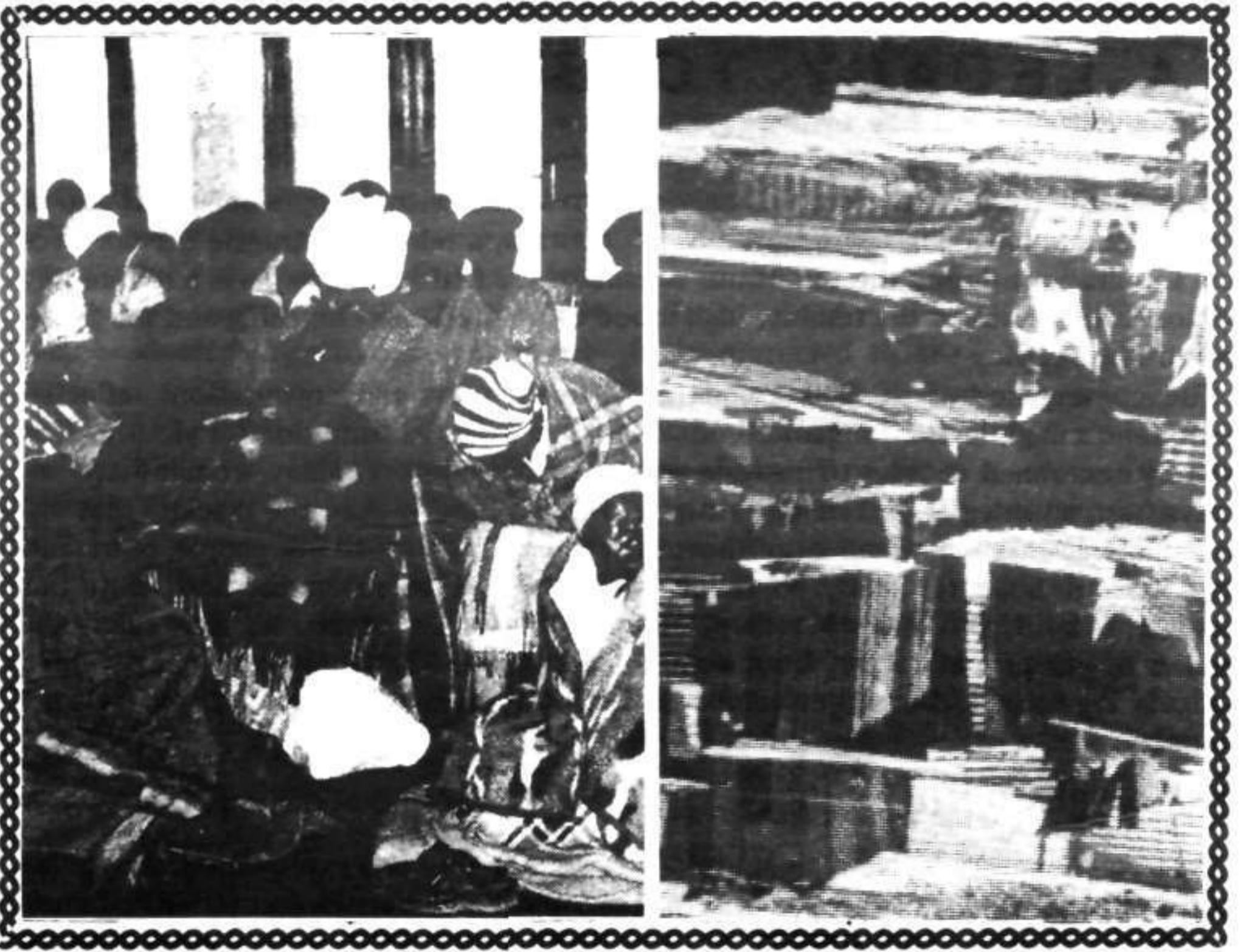
On March 27 women and 26 men went on a fast in St Georges Cathedral, for the right to live with their families. Apart from them there were two pregnant women and 15 children. Xoliswa Mgweba aged 35 was among them. She told a story of apartheid misery which is the daily experience of women in South Africa.

She was born in Cape Town and was taken to the Transkei at the age of 4 when her mother died. In 1965 Xoliswa came back to Cape Town looking for work where she realised that she had become an illegal immigrant in her land of birth. She lived with a man in Langa barracks and acquired a job as a domestic servant.

Xoliswa was evicted in July with 2 000 others and went to settle in a bush near Cross-

roads. Here she was uprooted again and arrested but came out on bail and returned to the bush. Racist thugs came again, demolished their shacks and carted them to the Transkei where there is no work or accomodation. Eventually they returned to Cape Town.

Xoliswa was arrested and deported to the Transkei innumerable times only to come back. This is the inhuman apartheid system at work which in the process relegates men and women to a position of abject poverty and humiliation. A system which the Reagan Administration has exalted through its 'constructive engagement' policies to be a terror squad in the sub-region.



This is the system that tries to deny to the whole world that 24 million blacks are citizens of South Africa. To justify this myth Africans are made immigrants to the 87 percent 'white South Africa', this process being facilitated by the migrant labour system, pass laws and influx control.

Mine workers are paid starvation wages which according to racist mentality is supplemented by subsistence farming in their tribal areas. Women are, according to this myth, keeping this subsistence base going, but we know this to be a lie. There is absolutely no land to farm.

The racist rulers are conveniently forgetting, too, that these fertile lands constituting the 87 percent of South Africa were expropriated by the 1913 Land Act and the 1936 Trust Land Act. These liars deny the fact that in Gazankulu and Lebowa a peasant

family's annual income is equal to the average white family's monthly grocery bill. The wealth and high standard of living achieved in white urban areas have been attained as a result of impoverishment and killer-diseases ridden conditions of the reserves.

WHAT THEN IS THE CONTENT OF WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION?

This must show the women that their problems are a component part of the liberation struggle which is based on all our problems in South Africa. It is imperative that women must rally and work together, directing the main thrust of their struggle towards the destruction of fascist dictatorship. The main duty facing the women in South Africa is to participate at all levels in the liberation struggle and in our people's army, Umkhonto we Sizwe, in particular.

It is very common for women to confine the content of their struggle to a struggle against male domination. Capitalist production has created this contradiction between men and women. Apartheid is used to entrench it. Men and women are used as pawns, they are pitted against one another to prolong the existence of capitalist relations and keep our people in perpetual subjugation. These are divisive tactics. They have had their effect, men feel superior to women and women feel inferior to men.

But it must be stressed that in our case these contradictions cannot be allowed to be antagonistic when we know who the enemy is. Women and men must join hands. The emancipation of women in South Africa lies on their full and unconditional participation in the struggle for the liberation of our country and people.

Let us not be side-tracked into the world of false glitter. At this present stage of our struggle there are burning issues around which all South Africans must rally. The enemy is getting more aggressive and repressive. Notwithstanding this brutality it is panic-stricken. While the creation of a black 'middle class' is a ploy it shows that the enemy is aware of its doom. It is desperate to create collaborationists who will have a stake in the apartheid system. Let the women fight relentlessly inside the country, joining all the organisations that rally around the people's document, the Freedom Charter. Let us join the struggle and campaign against rent increases, rising cost of living and for the release of Nelson Mandela, our leaders and all other political prisoners. Let us campaign against puppet institutions and genocidal legislation. Let us not hesitate to denounce and deal accordingly with those who are traitors to their own people.

As women we must take our place in the fighting ranks of our people's army, Umkhonto we Sizwe. This is a task which must be fulfilled urgently. The enemy has declared an unprovoked war on all our people, young and old, men and women. We must get trained and armed to defend and liberate ourselves together with our entire people. Countless examples of heroism displayed by women of our land in the face of a vicious enemy are enough proof of our ability to fight with guns in hand. As the Vietnamese put it: "*Women are the greatest victims of the war, but they are also its greatest heroes.*" This is what the spirit of August 9 is about - the heroism of women of our embattled Motherland, a legacy left to us by brave and determined women. It is a legacy that must be preserved and enriched at all costs.