

WOMEN AND WAR: SOUTH AFRICA/ USA

"The principle of the right of self-determination must not be regarded as being negotiable."
P.W. Botha, 1977

The above quote is the unchanged and uncompromising position of the ruling Nationalist Party to Black demands for freedom. "Self-determination of the white nation" means the continuation of white supremacy and massive Black suffering.

The white South African government has made it clear:
MILITARY APARTHEID WILL CONTINUE TO SYSTEMATICALLY DENY BLACK MEN AND WOMEN THEIR RIGHT TO FREEDOM AND JUSTICE . . . BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS.

The South African government (in a country of 25 million, 82% of whom are Black) is waging a war on two fronts: first, within the country against the Black majority, and second, beyond their borders against frontline countries and especially against the people of Namibia, a country illegally occupied by South Africa since 1915. There are presently over 70,000 white South African troops fighting SWAPO (South West African People's Organization), the liberation movement of the Namibian people.

In 1977, "Piet Wapon" (weapon) Botha, Prime Minister and former Minister of Defence, issued a "manifesto of total strategy," defined as the strategy for the survival of apartheid.

Simply, "total strategy" has become the catch phrase to describe the militarization of South African society. "Total strategy" is a strategy to defend apartheid colonialism by using every possible means available to the South African state.

The military now reaches out into every area of life, from politics, to the churches, to culture and education, the economy, and even the family.

This has profound effects on women in South African society, Black and white.

SAMRAF, the South African Military Refugee Aid Fund, an organization of white South African war resisters, exiles, and American supporters, is committed to exposing and weakening the apartheid state, and actively supports the liberation movements in southern Africa. SAMRAF, as an American based organization, also is committed to actively working in the U.S. against racism and sexism, and in support of the liberation movements here.

As a white organization we believe that whites who are progressive can play a small but important role in South Africa's struggle. The "success" of total strategy depends upon the success of the racist regime in winning the hearts and minds of white South Africans. The regime has been successful to date. And, not unlike South Africa, racism in the U.S. depends upon the same. However, each time a young white man refuses to fight and kill for apartheid; every time a soldier deserts; any time there is any resistance in the military or in society at large by whites, the white supremacist South African government is weakened and the military's total strategy is weakened by not having the "total" support from within the white community.

What Does This Have To Do With Women?

The land, cattle, the family and the collective community were central to the lives of Black people in South Africa prior to colonialist rule. Not long after the arrival of whites in 1652, Black people became landless, their resources stolen, and their labor controlled and brutally exploited. As this happened, the relative prestige and power



over...

Black women had because of their pivotal role in subsistence agriculture, crumbled. Black women and men, relegated to an inferior position, were rapidly denied their right to move freely, and live freely.

The militarization of society has deepened the oppression of Black people. The control of Black women in particular has become more blatant. The apartheid war has a special effect on the lives of Black women. Statistics come to life: 50% infant mortality rate . . . sterilization . . . the use of Depo Provera . . . pass laws . . . "homeland" policy . . . starvation . . . malnutrition.

Much has been researched and written about the situation and inhuman exploitation of Black women. Very little attention, however, has been paid to white women and where they fit into the overall picture. White women are part of the group which oppresses. White people have power over the lives of Black men and women. White women play a very important role in upholding the status quo; through the socialization of children in the family and at school, by supporting the Nationalist Party, and by doing behind-the-scenes support work for the "boys on the border," etc. Within the white society, women have a subordinate role to men, having little economic or political independence, and denied very basic women's rights. The overriding fact of their racism and white privilege, however, blurs whatever sexual oppression there is. It is very interesting to see how cleverly the South African state has kept traditional roles of women and female stereotypes going, and how they have used the traditional role of women to support the apartheid war effort.

The Women and War Project grew out of the growing need to understand and analyze the role of white women in upholding the war machine with the belief that women, white women, can also be mobilized to subvert the apartheid war machine.

First, we hope to expose through research, the specific nature of the oppression of Black women, and how it fits into the "total strategy" of white supremacy.

Secondly, and more significant for our work, we will take a look at the role of white women in South African society. Special attention will be placed on the role women play in the war effort, the behind-the-scenes support work, etc. We are developing a program that can begin to draw attention in the U.S. and South Africa to the role of women, and hopefully, help in challenging that role. White women's complicity with apartheid is historic; however, there are more than traces of white women's resistance to both sexism and apartheid. The South African feminist movement is a fledgling one: women are involved in the struggle and we, as South African and American women, wish to offer our support to them and their struggle.



the women and war project will:

*** POSSIBLE PROJECT AREAS INCLUDE:

- *** LOOK AT THE EFFECTS OF THE TOTAL STRATEGY ON BLACK WOMEN -- Women Under Fascism
- *** MAKE LINKS BETWEEN THE U.S. WOMEN'S MOVEMENT, ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT, AND FEMINISTS AND ACTIVISTS IN SOUTH AFRICA THROUGH JOINT WORK AND SUPPORT -- Socialization of Children: Christian National education
- *** LOOK AT THE ROLE OF WHITE WOMEN, IN THEIR FAMILIES, IN THE MILITARY, IN SOCIETY AT LARGE -- White Women and the Family
- *** STUDY THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MILITARY -- Church, Women, and the Military

If you are interested in working on the Women and War Project, or have ideas, contacts or research you would like to share, contact:

SAMRAF
29 Seventh Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11217
(212) 638-0417